



BOING BOING

#15

\$5



STARRING KATA SUTRA

no more

BOING BOING

subscriptions?

IMPORTANT:

This man learned that *Boing Boing* is no longer offering subscriptions, and in his resulting state of blind panic, has launched himself into orbit without a spacesuit. He did not know he could purchase single copies of future issues directly from *Boing Boing* headquarters. Please do not make the same mistake he made — Earth's orbit paths are already cluttered.



Available issues: #12, 13, 14, 15.

Estimated arrival of #16: 1999. Order now!
Per copy: \$5 USA, \$6 International.
11288 Ventura Blvd #818 Studio City CA 91604

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Many thanks to Ken Sitz for his expert production advice and assistance! Ken & Teresa produce the wonderful www.postfun.com.

WELCOME



Well, *Boing Boing* has come full circle. We've gone from a zine, to a wanna-be-authentic publication, to a stressed and on-the-verge-of-selling-out ad-accepting magazine, all the way back to a small, unorganized zine. And does it feel good!

But just before we completed this circle, I think we confused a lot of you by spreading rumors that we were folding for good. Sorry about that – it was just a ploy to get our other 15,000 readers to scram. See, we needed to scale down. We wanted to do away with selling ads, which made working at *Boing Boing* seem like a cheap used-car business instead of the brain-flipping joy that it is. But with no ad revenue we couldn't afford to produce such a huge circulation. Our solution: keep our dedicated 1,000 subscribers and use our car-selling techniques to fib that we're closing up shop to everyone else.

And I have another secret to tell you. To prove that we really are a non-advertising non-profit old-fashioned zine again, we delayed #15 for nearly two years, just to show some true zine spirit. This

issue was actually ready for consumption 21 3/4 months ago, but we didn't want to seem like we were one of those orderly magazines primed for ads. We didn't want you to think we were another *Details*. We also didn't want those evil, er, eager distributors (another load now off our backs!) knocking down our door for their latest *Boing* batch. So we sat on our hands and tapped our toes for 1 3/4 years, dusting off the front cover every few months, until our excitement overcame us and we had to give in. From now on we'll try to get this out within a year.

Speaking of *Details* reminds me of the main reason why we would never just up and quit. We are one of their suppliers of ideas! We couldn't leave them out on a limb. Like remember that cute icon-based aphrodisiac article we did in our sex issue (#10)? It was the basis for *Details'* almost carbon-copied aphrodisiac piece a few months later. And you know our cute T-shirt mascot, Kata Sutra? She was the model for their Surfer Girl character (whom *Details* originally

named Geek Girl – they had used their tried-and-true idea-borrowing methods to "create" that name, until the owner of the real geekgirl at www.geekgirl.au.com understandably snatched the name back). The list goes on. What would they do without us? We don't even want to ponder such a horrific question. Of course the *Details* editors haven't yet thanked us for the fine array of stories and ideas we've kindly supplied them with, but we like to think they're just shy peoples.

Anyway, we hope you like our new turn. At least our address is still the same, and once your subscription runs out, you're still more than welcome to order *Boing Boing* on a per issue basis. And when you're in between issues, check on our frequently updated Website (www.well.com/user/mark), which has all sorts of articles not seen anywhere on paper.

Until next time!

Carla

bOING bOING

SPRING 1997

NUMBER 15

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PETER WILSON IS NO FUN
You might want to consider striking the name of Peter Lambhorn Wilson of WBAI-FM's "Moorish Orthodox Radio Crusade" off your comp list. I'm not trying to make trouble or anything, but while reviewing the last issue on his show, he was hemming and hawing very sarcastically when mentioning it, and was making dumbass comments when describing the contents, for example: "'The Barbi Twin on Metabolism Hacking' – oh boy..." "Bruce Sterling on 'Dead Media' – whoopee oh goody, etc." And then at the end, he even went so far as to say, "...and I'll give you the address to send for this if you're *really* still interested in this sort of thing." What the fuck's his problem?

In Cannabis Veritas,
Cary G.
New York, NY

Yikes! Looks like a nasty case of CDD (Curiosity Deficit Disorder). The only cure is taking daily baths in tubs full of Gak, Floam, and Smud. We wish Mr. Wilson the best of luck!

BOUNCING BACK

HAPPY MUTANT MAIL

I have picked up, read, re-read, recommended, re-read and am still digesting the most glorious *Happy Mutant Handbook*. JOY JOY JOY JOY JOY JOY!

Is it just me or is the "Geek Girl" character/column in *Details* magazine just a little too close to *Kata Sutra*? Just add teenage-mutant-ninja-hacker attitude, sophomoric humor and stir.

Anonymous

Details' "Geek Girl" (now called "Surfer Girl") is the unfortunate result of an experiment involving Sonic Hedgehog and DNA stolen from Kata Sutra. We claim no responsibility for the little monster.

BEN IS WIRED

Hey kids, bitchin' cover this month! At first I thought it was a new issue of *Ben is Dead*, but I was pleased to see you all are still around. Then I opened up the zine and saw the Fujitsu ad, and I thought I'd picked up a black and white issue of *Wired*.



But then I saw the graphics for the Dead Media Project, and I knew I was back in the world of bOING bOING. Can't wait to actually read the new ish!

Anonymous

Neither can we!

BREAKING HIS OWN RULES

I have always had 5 very good reasons for not subscribing to magazines (in no particular order):

1. I like walking to the store and perusing the zine section.
2. I don't like to give my address away, knowing it inevitably ends up somewhere I don't want it.
3. I like getting a magazine in one piece. USPS tends to mangle things no matter how hard you try.
4. I like getting a magazine as soon as it comes out. I absolutely scream when it appears on the shelves of a store, and I haven't gotten mine in

the mail yet.

5. I don't want to lose the remainder of my subscription money if the zine goes belly-up.

bOING bOING broke the mold in the worst way. I think your zine is amazing, and of all the stuff I read regularly cover-to-cover (*Wired*, *Mondo*, *Fringe-Ware Review*, *2600*, *Iron Feather*, *Plazm*, *bOING bOING*, and *Linux Journal*) I only subscribe to the last two. The reason why is simple. They're not available at newsstands. This I thought was going to be true of *bOING bOING* so of course I thought, I'll finally have to heed the little-story-on-the-inside-front-cover and subscribe. But what, to my surprise, happens? It shows up once again on the newsstand shelves! Grrr... Does this mean I'm going to get one in the mail? Ok, I'll wait... and wait... and wait. For what seemed like an eternity since I first saw it on the shelves, I waited.

Two days later (it did seem like an eternity) I broke down and bought it. A couple days after that it arrived in OK condition in a little plastic wrapper in the mail...

So now that you have my subscription, albeit grudgingly, I'll commend you on a most fantastically-amazing zine. Keep up the good work, and try to get the subscriber copies out before the newsstand ones.

Sean

URGENT MESSAGE FROM CHIA-PETA

Every year, between 10,000 and 50,000 Chia Pets are returned to department stores after the holidays, with seed packets missing, packaging spoiled, instructions defaced. Marked unsaleable, these poor Chia-Pets now commence a pitiful odyssey toward an uncertain fate.

Only a small percentage of these "unwanted" Chia Pets are placed in shelters, or eventually find loving homes. The rest are needlessly destroyed, or subjected to cruel experimentation by ceramicists.

In addition, hundreds of thousands of imitation-brand Chia-animals are seized by the patent office here and abroad, and summarily executed. These are not authentic Chia Pets, but many are almost indistinguishable from the real thing and just as deserving of affection. It is hardly their fault that they are the product of unscrupulous trademark infringers.

You can do something to change all this. You can bring a bare reddish clay animal into your home and shower it with water and light until it sprouts a carpet of greenish "fur." The joy you will bring your family will more than offset the trivial inconvenience of daily waterings.

Won't you help?

Contact your nearest Chia-Peta representative, and adopt a slightly damaged or off-brand Chia Pet today.

Write to bOING bOING! mark@well.com

UNCLASSIFIED ADS

BOING BOING Back issues #1-14. Complete, mint. Best offer. 415/864-6105.

RARE BOOKS by Rucker, Shirley, Sterling, Laidlaw, Kadrey, Platt, and Jeter among others. Also: Free Cyberpunk bibliography, 1980-1995. SASE: JAA, P.O. Box 96, New York NY 10012.

WANTED: Esprit brain machine. Write to George Angelidis, P.O. Box 622, Simpsonville KY 40067.

HUGE \$8 MANUALS: Retire without money, Strength of Samson Secrets, Triple your intelligence, Hard Times Survival. Incredible Inquiry Catalog \$1. Box 2207, Garden Valley ID 83622.

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GOOD VIBRATIONS: Honest, intelligent catalogs of top-quality erotic toys, books, and videos. Affordable prices too! Both catalogs \$4, applied to first order. Confidentiality and satisfaction guaranteed. 1210 Valencia #BB, San Francisco CA 94110.

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GET BACK AT BUSINESSES / PROFESSIONALS for lousy services. Powerfully sarcastic letters. Send \$3 for 10 assorted. Paper Bullets, 16350 Ventura Blvd. #150-G, Encino, CA 91436.

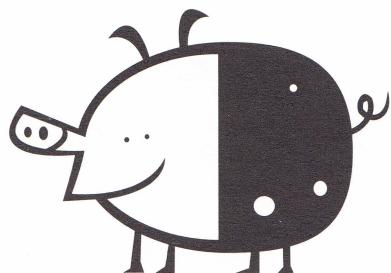
CHOMSKY now on home video! Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media. 2 video set. \$39.95 + \$5 S/H. Send check or M.O. to What's Left, PO Box 18A, Denver CO 80218.

NEUROtica

32 WAYS TO ANNOY

1. Sing the Batman theme incessantly.
2. In the memo field of all your checks, write "for sensual massage."
3. Specify that your drive-through order is "to go."
4. Learn Morse code, and have conversations with friends in public consisting entirely of "Beeeep Bip Bip Beeeeeep Bip..."
5. If you have a glass eye, tap on it occasionally with your pen while talking to others.
6. Amuse yourself for endless hours by hooking a camcorder to your TV and then pointing it at the screen.
7. Speak only in a "robot" voice.
8. Push all the flat Lego pieces together tightly.
9. Start each meal by conspicuously licking all your food, and announce that this is so no one will "swipe your grub."
10. Leave the copy machine set to enlarge 200%, extra dark, 17 inch paper, 99 copies.
11. Stomp on little plastic ketchup packets.
12. Sniffle incessantly.
13. Leave your turn signal on for fifty miles.
14. Name your dog "Dog."
15. Insist on keeping your car windshield wipers running in all weather conditions "to keep them tuned up."
16. Reply to everything someone says with "that's what YOU think."
17. Claim that you must always wear a bicycle helmet as part of your "astronaut training."
18. Declare your apartment an independent nation, and sue your neighbors upstairs for "violating your airspace."
19. Forget the punchline to a long joke, but assure the listener it was a "real hoot."
20. Follow a few paces behind someone, spraying everything they touch with a can of Lysol.
21. Practice making fax and modem noises.
22. Highlight irrelevant information in scientific papers and copy them to your boss.
23. Make beeping noises when a large person backs up.
24. Invent nonsense computer jargon in conversations, and see if people play along to avoid the appearance of ignorance.
25. Erect an elaborate network of ropes in your backyard, and tell the neighbors you are a "spider person."
26. Finish all your sentences with the words "in accordance with prophesy."
27. Wear a special hip holster for your remote control.
28. Do not add any inflection to the end of your sentences, producing awkward silences with the impression that you'll be saying more any moment.
29. Signal that a conversation is over by clamping your hands over your ears.
30. Disassemble your pen and "accidentally" flip the ink cartridge across the room.
31. Give a play-by-play account of a person's every action in a nasal Howard Cosell voice.
32. Holler random numbers while someone is counting.

— "found" on the Net

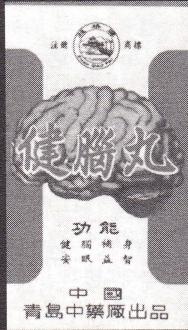


INTERNATIONAL DELICACIES FROM AROUND

CHINA: HEALTHY BRAIN PILLS

Our friend, Richard Kadrey, told us not to trust medicines from China. He told us, for example, some Chinese over-the-counter sleeping pills tested in a US lab were discovered to contain a Chinese analog of a Russian analog of

Thorazine. Other Chinese medicines have been found to contain heavy metals and other toxins. So now I'm too scared to take these tablets, which I bought at a little store in Chinatown. The label says that the Healthy Brain Pills are "a good medicine for overtax of brains, nuerasthenia, vertigo and dizziness, insomnia, general debility, lumbago, and poor memory."



Manufactured by Tsingtao Medicine Works in Tsingtao, China, this bottle of 300 blood red-colored, peppercorn-sized balls smells spicy and dusty. The yellow-colored swab of cotton at the top of the bottle is too small to effectively prevent the pills from rattling around, and the bright pink plastic cap clashes with the bottle's beautiful label. Also, the label is pasted on at a crooked angle. Don't they have any pride in workmanship? \$6.99

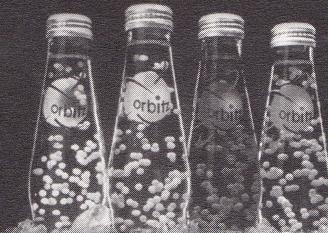
PAKISTAN: RASILY SUPARI

Betel nut is a popular drug in Western Asia. You stick a piece of the nut in a leaf, along with some lime, and put it in your cheek. Then you spit



red juice and pretend to get a buzz. This product is like an instant coffee version of betel nut: saccharin-coated betel nut chunks. You can get it at most Indian grocery stores.

CUISINE THE WORLD!



gel. The cylindrical-shaped plugs have the same density as the surrounding beverage, so they look like they are "frozen" in place. I don't know if this is such a good idea, because it makes you think the drink is going to be as thick as spit. And with oddball flavor combinations such as Raspberry Citrus, Blueberry Melon Strawberry, and Pineapple Banana Cherry Coconut, I can't help but think of those car fresheners made out of aroma-impregnated cardboard. I finally built up the nerve to drink one, and I have to admit, I've been won over. I love to take a sip, and then squash the little floating pieces against the roof of my mouth with my tongue. And the liquid isn't as thick, or as sweet, as I thought it would be.

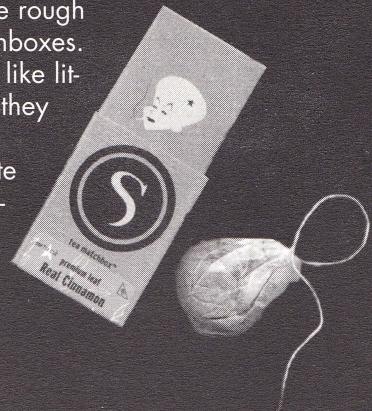
CANADA:

ORBITZ

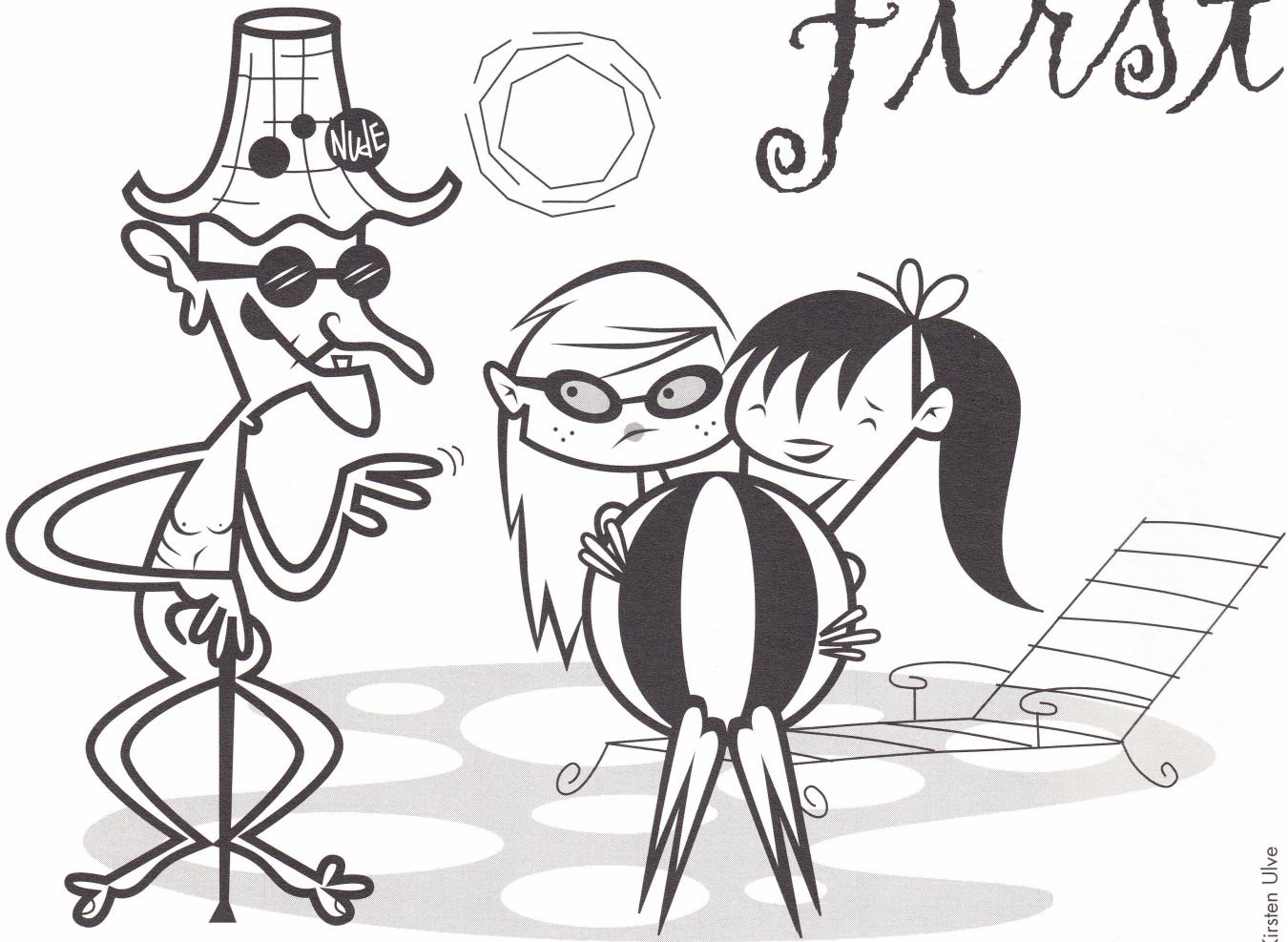
The floating bits in this non-carbonated beverage are made from a vegetable-based

USA: STEEP TEA

Last year, I started receiving whimsical email messages from a couple of people named Jeff and Karla. They told me they were starting a new tea company, and wanted me to come up with a mascot. I drew a bald, cigarette-smoking girl with an enormous cranium, as unlike a tea mascot as possible – and Jeff and Karla used it in their packaging! I could hardly believe it. Then they sent me a bunch of samples, which came packaged in cute rough cardboard matchboxes. The teabags are like little pouches and they are indeed delicious. My favorite is Always Mary - Soft Vanilla Pure. Call Jeff and Karla at 800 STEEP CO.



first



Kirsten Ulve

time nude

A Mind-Blowing Trip Inside the Shocking World of Naturism!

by Mary Belton

National Nude Weekend. Nudies will host an open house for the whole family at Olive Dell Ranch, Colton, California. Arts and crafts, carnival games, club tours. Nudity not required during this open house weekend. Free.

I call my friend Alison and read her the listing from the *LA Times*. Drive out to the desert, play some ring-toss, and check out the nudists. How can we not go? It's an

adventure. And, it's free.

I put sun block, a micro-cassette tape recorder and three disposable cameras in my bag – one regular, one panoramic, and one 3-D. I pick up Alison and she says, "I guess I'll bring a towel just in case, you want one?" "What?" In case of what? No towel necessary. I'm not getting nude. It hadn't even occurred to me. I'm picturing a couple of token nude people milling around and a bunch of looky-loos, like me, eating cotton candy. I thought the nudists would

be in glass enclosed habitats, like at the zoo.

So, we drive out to Colton, which is about an hour and a half outside of LA, in an ugly, dusty, wasteland. We get off the freeway and drive and drive, out into the absolute middle of nowhere. They don't even have a 7-Eleven in Colton, they have a "Super 7". It's really hot out here. About a mile past the fifty-cent car wash we finally come to a dirt road with a small, hand-painted sign that says, "Olive Dell Nudist Ranch" with an

arrow pointing up a hill. At this point I'm getting a little nervous because I'm thinking, Where is everybody? I thought there would be tons of people and maybe a Ferris wheel or something.

We arrive at a closed electric security gate. No one is around. The sign posted on the gate reads, "Private Property – No Trespassing" and next to a pass-key port there's another sign telling visitors to pick up the phone for entry. Now I'm afraid. I am certain this is some paramilitary compound for a sect of nudist Branch Davidians.

Suddenly, out of a little shack by the

Woman's Perspective." In it are photos of nude women smelling flowers, playing the piano, walking with crutches, doing arts and crafts, and climbing a ladder. I have never done any of these things nude.

There are vignettes of nudist women, like Joye, who "greets the day and her neighbors as nature intended, wearing simply a warm smile. After all, one's birthday suit is always in style – a timeless original, custom designed by Mother Nature for ultimate comfort, accented with a strong statement of self-esteem." Hmm. Some of the frequently asked questions listed: "Do men become visibly embarrassed

lot, putting on sun block, when this woman wearing just a large straw hat and sunglasses walks up to us. She warns me that sun block isn't really effective until a half-hour after application. She is really tan.

So, Nude Woman Number One introduces us to shapely Nude Carol and her huge, tattooed, scraggly-haired husband Nude Mike and they take us on a tour of the grounds. ("Mike and Carol, like the Bradys," Alison says.) There is a pool, a volleyball court, tennis courts, shuffle board, a club house, hiking trails ("watch out for

Uh oh. A guy with a pronounced Jersey accent and that hair, the kind that's short in front and long in back, is standing way too close to us, kind of hovering, holding a can of beer. It's the Nude Swinger.

gate comes this middle-aged, totally hairless man, nude. I close my eyes and put my head down. Poor Alison is trying to talk to the guy. She tells him we're here for the open house. He hands her the welcome packet that had been shielding his penis, and instructs us to drive through the gate.

We park in a dirt lot full of cars, pick-up trucks and a few trailers. And, there are all these nude people walking around. Not *one* looky-loo. We're the only clothed people there, and we're giggling like fools. We sit in the car, trying to calm down, looking over the literature the Nude Greeter gave us. One pamphlet is called "The Nude Experience from a

during their visits to a nudist resort?" "Will my picture be taken?" The list of rules includes: 1. No controlled drugs. 2. No firearms (!) and 11. You must always sit on a towel when nude.

Every time people walk by the car I check the rearview mirror to see if they are nude. They are. It becomes increasingly clear to us that at some point we will have to get nude, or get out. We have just driven an hour and a half to get here, so we can't wimp out now. Besides, it's not like there is anything else to do in Colton. Our Saturday would be blown. Eventually, after ten minutes or so, we calm down and get out of the car. Fully dressed. We are standing in the parking

snakes and tarantulas!" warns Nude Mike) and a little cafe ("best burgers around!" Nude Carol brags). Meanwhile, the "carnival" consists of a sad little booth where you throw darts at balloons taped to a piece of cardboard. The "arts and crafts" were feathered roach-clip earrings and Olive Dell Ranch spaghetti-strap tank-tops.

Whipping out tickets from behind his back, Nude Mike asks us if we are going to stay for the dance that night. He tells us we would be required to wear clothes to it. "The ranch is a family resort, so the owner doesn't want any body contact between guests while nude." He offers that we can dance top-

less if we want to, and we won't be required to wear panties under our skirts if we promise to twirl. Gee, thanks, Nude Mike, but we really have to get back to the city before dark.

After the tour we decide to grab a "Volleyball Burger." Everyone sitting in the cafe eating is nude. We, the Clothed, sit at a table in the back. Against the back wall are mail boxes, some shelves full of paperback books, and a collection of board games. We order, pick up a couple of books to hide behind later at the pool (a murder mystery, and a novelization of a TV-movie starring Kristy McNichol and Linda Lavin) and wait for our food. It's taking a long time, or so it seems to us, but we are hesitant to complain because we don't want to be uncool. Like, "God, those Clothed People are so uptight." "What's you're hurry, Clothed People?"

We finally get our food which really is delicious. Juicy burgers and crispy fries. Then we decide it is time to get nude. I wonder where we should go to change. Somehow, *getting* nude in front of a bunch of strangers seems even more embarrassing than *being* nude in front of a bunch of strangers. We take off our clothes in the parking lot, locking them in the trunk of the car. The ground is really hot so I have to keep my sneakers on. Alison is wearing clogs which, I notice, look much better than sneakers when you're nude.

I don't even remember walking from the car back to the patio. We are just suddenly there. Unfortunately, there aren't any unoccupied chaise lounges pool-side. The only free lounges are up

on this sort of platform to the side of the club house. We find two together and lie down. Almost immediately we are approached by a man wearing only a fisherman's hat with loads of buttons that say things like "My Kid's an Honor Student at Riverside High" and "DARE to say NO to Drugs." "First time nude?" he asks. He talks to us about the joys of Social Nudism and tries to convince us to lay out some dough to join. I make it through a conversation with him and realize that I have just spoken to a strange nude man wearing a goofy hat, while nude myself, for the first time in my life.

Then Alison and I start checking everyone out. Thank God we have sunglasses to hide behind at least. There are nudists of all ages and shapes here. Practically everyone is white, and very well-tanned. Most of the women wear big earrings and/or



From the brochure "The Nude Experience from a Woman's Perspective."
800/879-7833



Logo for the Western Sunbathing Association.
800/2 BE NUDE



"The Nude Experience from a Woman's Perspective."

anklets. I see one pierced nipple and lots of shoulder and butt tattoos. I guess if you're nude all the time you get really into tattoos, jewelry, and nail polish. There's a yuppie-looking couple lying by the pool, wearing matching blue baseball caps with corporate logos. Alison asks, "Do you think you could date a guy who hangs out at a nudist ranch?" "No." "Me neither."

We spot a beautiful boy, around 14 years old, wearing only a long, faded, indigo-blue T-shirt, and spend a long time staring at him. We had seen him earlier, when he was sitting at a table in the cafe. We had assumed he was embarrassed because his weird nudist parents made him come here, so he was sulking, refusing to take his shirt off. We fantasize about kidnapping him and bringing him back to LA.

After plotting out the quickest, least visible way to get to the pool, we sneak over and slip in. There are some little kids tossing balls

around with their parents in the shallow end. A man is spinning a little girl on his shoulders as she screams, delighted. We are hiding quietly in the deep end when a man with a moustache swims over to us. "First time nude?" Then, Button-Hat Guy jumps in and asks us if we've bought any raffle tickets. The mustached man says he hasn't sold any of his yet and Button-Hat Guy says, "None of the other boys on the force'll buy, huh?" Wow. A nude cop. Nude Cop says, "Nah, they're too cheap. Those guys won't buy anything that doesn't come with a free beer."

Back at our chaise lounges, we watch 14 Year-Old Boy play ping pong. He has muscular thighs. We wonder how old he really is. If he'd just take his shirt off we could probably tell. We try telepathically willing him to take it off. No luck. "Maybe he's sunburned." "Yeah, maybe." "But it's rule number eight: You must be nude on patio, deck and recreation areas at all times, weather permitting. It's not fair." "It should be mandatory for teenage boys to be nude. They have to set the example."

Soon, a musician comes out on the patio. DJ Digital Hippie. He has an electric keyboard strapped to his chest and he plays Beatles, Eagles, and Loggins & Messina songs. Yes, he is nude too. He keeps making corny jokes over the PA system. "Welcome to Olive Dell where you get to see more of your friends!" He has enormous testicles.

Nude Mike comes up and asks us if we would like to play volleyball. I just shake my head. Alison mutters something about, "Oh, thanks but we're gonna leave soon, I don't think...uh..." The

court is below the patio area so we lean over a rail to watch the game with a few other people. There are about twelve players. There is a guy who looks just like Robin Williams. And, there is a guy out there in nothing but a cowboy hat. He looks like a gay greeting card. (Happy Birthday, Pardner!) And a woman who put on her sun block unevenly so only her ass is bright red. A guy with a camera comes up and asks us if he can take a picture of us from behind. I guess we are going to be in the brochure or something. "Great. Should we ever become public figures they are gonna recognize us and bring that picture back. That's what always happens."

OK, now here is the part that most amazes me. Alison and I get up, nude, and play ping pong. Nude. Yes we did, thank you ma'am. The table is in the middle of the patio, right next to DJ Digital Hippie's set-up. We have a really hard time getting a rally going and we continually have to run around chasing the ball. I hit it too hard, and it rolls under where the Digital Hippie is standing. Alison has to crawl under him to get it. He interrupts his rendition of "House at Pooh Corner" to shout, "Hey, I know that trick," over the PA system.

The volleyball game breaks up and some people wander over to the table, waiting their turn to play the winner. I am not playing nude ping pong with anyone but Alison, so we decide to go buy souvenirs. There's no point in getting nude if you can't prove it. We go to the arts and crafts table to buy a couple of tank-tops from Nude Coed. She tells us about the time a radio station came up

to do a story on the ranch and they took a picture of her with K-FROG bumper stickers over her breasts and crotch.

We go back to our chaise lounges. It's getting late so we're just going to get a little more sun and then head home. And then... "First time nude?" Uh oh. A guy with a pronounced Jersey accent and that hair, the kind that's short in front and long in back, is standing way too close to us, kind of hovering, holding a can of beer. It's the Nude Swinger.

"Where you guys from? Stayin' for the dance? Been to any of the other clubs?" Hey man, do you mind not hitting on us? I mean, we're nude! For the first time all day I feel disgusted. "You guys smoke?" "No." "Drink?" "No." "Hey, don't you girls have any vices?" "No." (Oh yeah, except, well, we really like having three-ways with strange guys we meet at nudist camps, but you probably wouldn't be into that.) He walks away and we think we've frozen him out. Suddenly he's back, carrying a beach chair. "I saw a nasty accident on the freeway on the way in. I think some people were killed. You guys better stick around for a while. Sure you don't want a beer?" That does it. Time to go.

We say good-bye to Nude Carol and thank her for the hospitality. She invites us to come back anytime and hands us a list of upcoming events: "August 19: Wet T-shirt and Hot Buns contest. September 23: Slave Auction." For all their freedom from convention, the Olive Dell nudists are not very politically correct. We don't get the sense that they take up any cause beyond being nude. It's not like these people are new-age, arty, hippie nudists. This is not a holistic philosophy. They

want to say, "We are not different from you, we just want to be nude." They're eatin' meat and smokin' filterless. In the cafe, there's a "We Support Our Boys in the Gulf" bumper sticker – a window into the soul of the nudist colony, in Alison's opinion.

Well, that was something. We got nude with the nudists. Feeling bold and defiant, we consider driving back to town as we are, but remember the Nudist Motto, "Unclothed when possible, clothed when practical." With bitter-sweet regret, we slowly get dressed as a man who has the Chinese alphabet tattooed all the way down his side walks past us and waves goodbye.

We get back in the car and start toward Los Angeles. "I wonder if, the next time I have to be nude in front of someone in some capacity, it'll be easier." "I don't know. I think we have already created an image for ourselves in front of our friends. And that image would be non-nudist." "Is this the way we came?" "Yeah, remember we passed 'Hitching Post Beef Jerky'? We have to take a right. Can we?" "What was that? It looked like a chipmunk, but maybe it was a lizard. And there's a chicken hawk or something." "We are in the middle of fuckin' nowhere." "Look at all that smog! It's a dustbowl over there!" "Where's my on-ramp?" "They had really good burgers." "And the fries. The fries were damn good." "I'm hungry again." "Me too." "Didn't you say earlier that you wanted a doughnut?" "An inflatable one, for the pool." "Oh." "There should have been more of the 14 Year-Old Boy naked." "Yeah. I miss him already." X

Cronenberg Q&A

by David Pescovitz

Film director David Cronenberg is sure good at casting the right slime, ooze, and innards in his movies. Sloshing, bubbling sounds can be heard (and often seen!) throughout his surrealist Sci Fi-horror films including *Scanners*, *Videodrome*, *The Fly*, *Dead Ringers*, and *Naked Lunch*. We're surprised that the movie studio even let him make his most recent film, a violently gurgling adaptation of JG Ballard's auto/erotic novel *Crash*. Due out in early '97, it's an exquisitely twisted amalgamation of metal, flesh, and fun – sort of like Cronenberg! (Except for the metal.) – DP

Why are you so fascinated with slime? Well, I don't think it's fascination with *slime* really. It's just all 'body' stuff. It's acknowledging the mystery of the human body, which for most people is repulsive. They like the surface only. It's sort of what I talk about in *Dead Ringers* – inner beauty. Why isn't there a beauty contest for the insides of people's bodies? If you take a beautiful woman and were to see what was inside of her – open her up – most men would be completely repulsed. I find that very strange. It's sort of saying "well we haven't yet acknowledged what we are."

Did you enjoy playing with goopy slimy stuff when you were a kid? I don't think more than anybody else. I had a pretty straightforward childhood I think. I mean I had a chemistry set, but so did a lot of other people.

I like chemistry sets. Did you enjoy playing with your chemistry set? Yeah, but I didn't get into it as much as I wanted

to. I think I wanted the chemicals to do more, and of course secretly your parents were wanting them to do less. It wasn't until I got into college that I really saw what you could do with chemicals.

What kind of scientist would you have been? I would hope that I would come up with some theory that would be so controversial it would have people getting into fist fights at conventions just as they did over *Crash* at Cannes. And then to be vindicated by having the proof of what you have done become evident!

I took a class at Berkeley where we studied critical theory by deconstructing several science fiction films including *Videodrome*. Are you consciously aware of how the trendy French intellectuals and their fans relate to your work? No, I still don't know what semiotics is about. I mean *they* might be interested in my work, and that's fine, but I don't have to be interested in *theirs*. What happens even when we are doing an interview like this is that I'm being forced to be analytical about something that I wasn't analytical about when I was doing it. The creative act comes from a different place.

I can't wait to see that professor again. "Sir, I knew it! David Cronenberg actually told me he wasn't thinking about Baudrillard or Marx when he made *Videodrome*!" You were right. It's legitimate to try all that stuff out, but to delude yourself that the filmmaker was creating out of that is in fact a real delusion. Artist don't come from the same place at all. It's a different part of the brain. X

the DEAD MEDIA PROJECT



Paul Mavrides

A PROGRESS REPORT

by Bruce Sterling

Hi, Bruce Sterling here. Richard Kadrey's in Morocco.

In the previous issue of *Boing Boing*, Kadrey and I formally launched a scheme called "The Dead Media Project." You see, the two of us got mighty tired of all

these eager, glossy, yelping books about Internet, multimedia, and virtual reality, so we decided that we wanted to see a very different book. A book about forms of media that are already obsolete. A big solid coffeetable tombstone of a book, which would grimly confront the postmodern Information Society with the topic it least likes to acknowl-

edge: abject technological failure.

However, we don't have the time, skill or energy to tackle this huge topic ourselves.

But so what? Being *fin-de-millennium* people-of-modems, we figured we might be able to inveigle Internet folks into doing a lot of the work for us. After all, people on the Internet are just sitting there staring into glass boxes and moving their

fingers up and down, so it's obvious that they have lots of spare time. The trick is to get them to entertain one another while coincidentally helping us out.

Well, my original notion was to establish some way-happening Dead Media Website with lots of interactive bells-and-whistles and cool digitized graphics of defunct steampunk machines like Bell's Photophone and Zuccato's Trypograph, so as to lure in potential contributors. I had several constructive chats with a number of webbing mavens. I

learned a lot. But nothing much was actually happening in the way of disinterring dead media.

The Web can display content, but it doesn't provide any. Personally, while purportedly web-surfing, I usually spend most of my time leafing through unread magazines, and darned if those magazines aren't a lot more interesting than web content. Most web people seem to spend their time and energy hotlinking you to someplace far away, in an endless febrile search for actual knowledge. Besides, building the websites is the fun part, while keeping them up to date is grim personal drudgery. This is why most websites are always "Under Construction," although they haven't

been updated since September 1994.

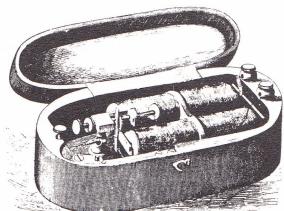
I've discovered that if I can manage to provide some consistent, up-to-date content, then webspiders come swarming on their own accord and will put all the Dead Media stuff up for free – in fact, they'll even do this *without permission*. The trick is to get them to

create websites for you without becoming legally liable for their graphic copyright infringements. I'm working on this aspect right now.

I suspect that the trick to this is to stop worrying about it. After all, the SPA, the

Church of Scientology and kidporn-crazed Bavarian district attorneys have already got their hands full. The coolest thing about dead media is that it's *dead*. It is therefore of no commercial potential. Info is always allowed to be free as long as it's no threat to somebody's revenue stream.

So, I set up a Dead Media mailing list (or rather, cajoled an actual programmer to do this for me). Nothing too fancy, just an email exploder with a dozen names or so, run off the machine of the local Fringeware cyberslackers. A couple of dozen interested parties joined the list. Then, several dozen. Lately they're coming in at the rate of a dozen a week. If my mailing-list



United States Civil War network-tapping spy gear

reaches a few hundred dozen I'm sunk, so if that happens I'll just stop taking subscriptions. I'll just cross my arms and hold my breath until some volunteer arrives to sub-distribute the list for me. I have little doubt that some helpful soul will magically appear to do this for me. There seems to be tremendous biological back-pressure in a mailing list that's actually entertaining. I don't have to promote or publicize the DMML; it has reached critical mass and now it jets like trampled toothpaste.

The contents of this list are nothing elaborate or fancy. They consist of Dead Media Working Notes, which are brief pithy comments about various dead forms of media, written by people from all over the place. These notes always appear in a consistent format, they always cite their sources, and they are always written in complete, grammatical English sentences. Plus, they're edited. This is why they don't look, sound or act like the usual vacuous newsgroup clutter.

Weirdly, not one human being has ever asked to be removed from the Dead Media Mailing List. Not everyone on the list contributes to it, of course – maybe ten percent contribute, while the rest just lurk – but nobody has ever asked me to stop sending them obscure minutiae about dead media. I really can't figure this. Lately the pace of submissions has picked up quite a head of steam, so I'm spewing out all kinds

of demented crap on a fairly brisk schedule, endless goofy snippets about dead talking dolls with whole phonographs tucked inside their heads, piggy banks that bleat and grunt with the face of Hitler, microwave-powered robot AWACS planes, WWI messenger-pigeons with their legs shot off in combat, there's no end to it. But people just sop this stuff up.

Figure 1 is what the resultant database looks like so far (circa January 96).

So far, so good, you see. Once

I accumulate eight or nine hundred of these squibs, it'll be clear that there's some kind of book in order. I may even write it myself.

I consider the jewel of the Project to be our Master List of Dead Media

(www.mediahistory.com/dead/archive.html). It's a very fragmentary list, but it's the only list of its kind that is known to me. Ideally, this list would eventually catalog every form of dead media known to humanity. This will never happen; some forms of communication are utterly lost,

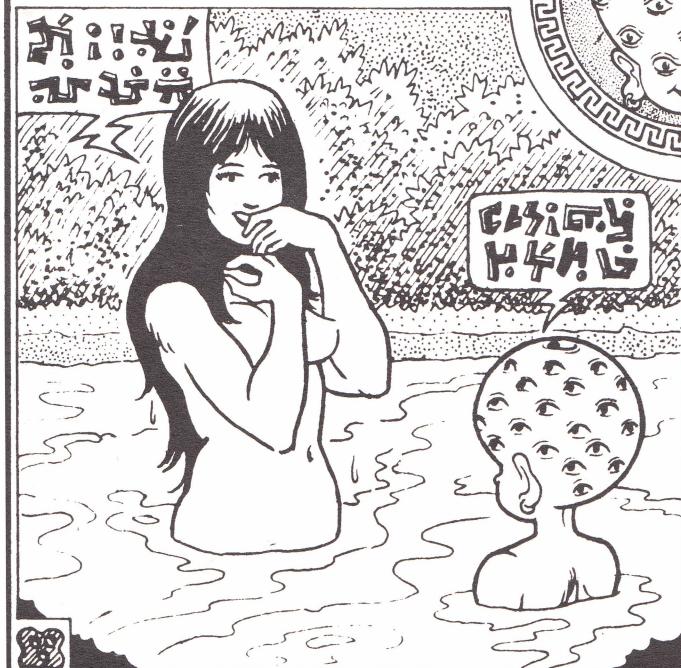
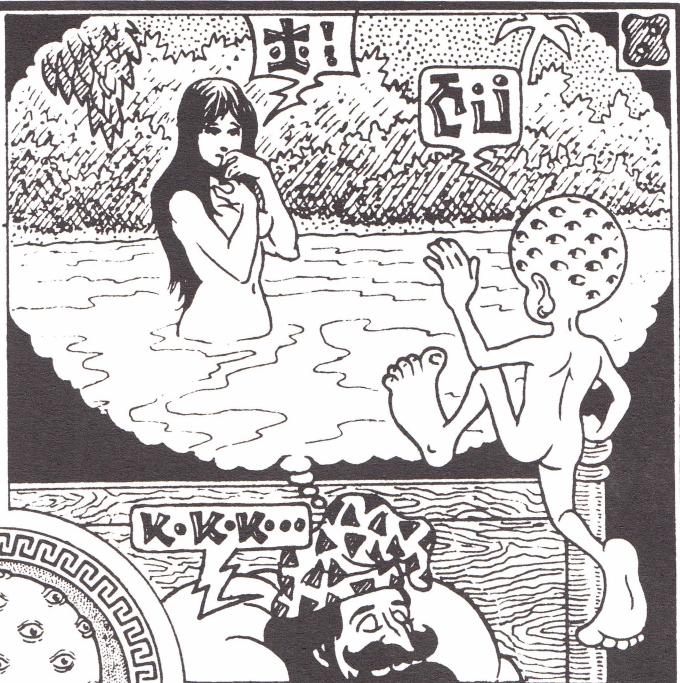
and besides we Dead Media Necronauts are still pretty foggy on our definitions of "medium" (and for that matter "dead"). However, I think that this list alone will get my basic point across. This list is the elephant's graveyard.

We at Dead Media Project are actively hunting for data in all these categories, and also hunting for more categories. If you want to help (or just want to watch) send e-mail. I believe I'm going to be at this for quite a while. – Bruce Sterling (bruces@well.com) x

Figure 1. Dead Media Working Notes

- 0.01. The Incan quipu
- 0.02. Chaucerian virtual reality
- 0.03. The Incan quipu
- 0.04. Kid media: viewmasters, filmstrips, portable projectors, Teddy Ruxpin
- 0.05. Dead personal computers
- 0.06. Dead mainframes; early computation devices
- 0.07. The cyrograph
- 0.08. The scopitone
- 0.09. Dead computer languages
- 01.0 The magic lantern
- 01.1 The magic lantern
- 01.2 Clockwork radio
- 01.3 The magic lantern
- 01.4 The term "Dead"
- 01.5 Silent film, diorama, panorama
- 01.6 The magic lantern
- 01.7 The Comparator; the Rapid Selector
- 01.8 Bibliography: Magic lanterns, Photography, Optical Toys, Early Cinema
- 01.9 The Experiential Typewriter
- 02.0 The magic lantern
- 02.1 Canada's Telidon Network
- 02.2 Cryptanalytic Devices of WWII

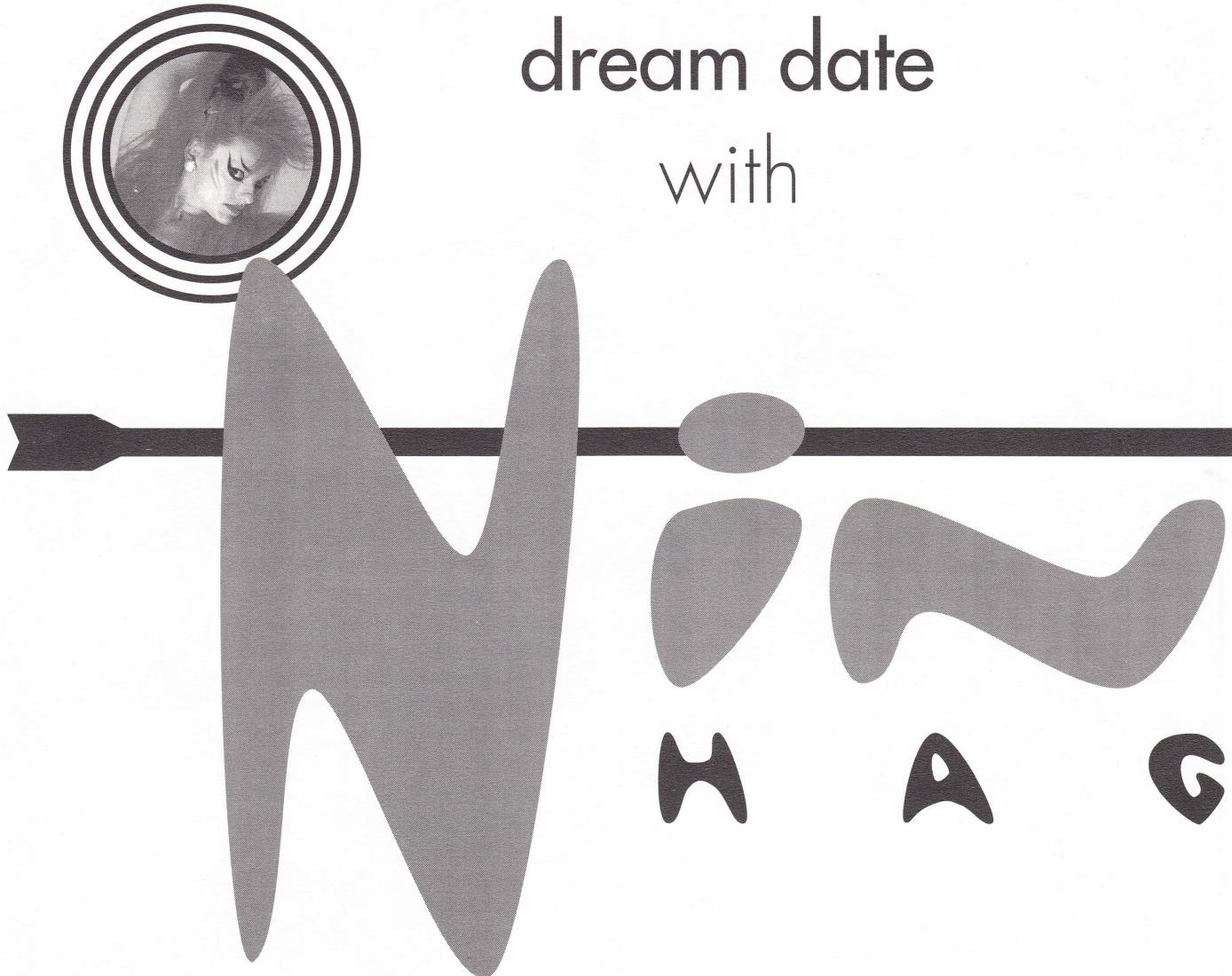
- 02.3 The Stenograph
- 02.4 Canada's Telidon Network; Australia's Viatel and Discovery 40
- 02.5 The Copy Press, the Hektograph, Edison's Electric Pen, Zuccato's Trypograph, Gestetner's Cyclostyle, Dick-Edison Mimeograph, the Gammeter aka Multigraph, the Vari typer, the IBM Selectric
- 02.6 Military Telegraphy, Balloon Semaphore
- 02.7 Mirror Telegraphy: The Heliograph, the Helioscope, the Heliostat, the Heliotrope
- 02.8 Schott's Organum Mathematicum
- 02.9 The Voder, The Vocoder, the Cyclops Camera, the Memex
- 03.0 C. X. Thomas de Colmar's Arithmometer
- 03.1 Toy telegraphy; toy telephony
- 03.2 Phonographic Dolls
- 03.3 The IBM Letterwriter
- 03.4 the Zuse Ziffernrechner; the V1, Z1, Z2, Z3 and Z4 program-controlled electro-mechanical digital computers; the death of Konrad Zuse
- 03.5 Loutherbourg's Eidophusikon
- 03.6 Karakuri; the Japanese puppet theater of Chikamatsu
- 03.7 Dead memory systems
- 03.8 the Kinetophone; the "Kinetophone Project"
- 03.9 Clockwork wall animation
- 04.0 Skytale, the Spartan code-stick
- 04.1 The pigeon post
- 04.2 The pigeon post
- 04.3 The pigeon post
- 04.4 The pigeon post
- 04.5 The pigeon post; the balloon post
- 04.6 The pigeon post
- 04.7 Vidscan
- 04.8 Miniature Recording Phonograph, Neophone Records, Poulsen's Telephone, the Multiplex Grand Graphophone and the Photophone
- 04.9 Kids' Dead Media 1929: Mirrorscope, Vista Chromoscope, Rolmonica, Chromatic Rolmonica
- 05.0 The Speaking Picture Book; squeeze toys that 'speak'
- 05.1 SHARP, microwave-powered relay plane
- 05.2 Refrigerator-mounted Talking Note Pad
- 05.3 The Experiential Typewriter



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my outta site
dream date
with





In March of 1981 I saw a spread in *Creem Magazine* on an East German punk sensation named Nina Hagen. Her history was compelling enough, but it was her aesthetic that seduced me; she looked like Easter Sunday, Halloween, Valentine's and St. Patrick's Day, Christmas morning and New Years' Eve, all fused together with a deadening jolt of galvanic electricity. From a thorough beating of bleach, dyes and fixatives, her

hair – colored a flaming pink – stood on end in sharp sprays, her face was lacquered with a frenzied cosmetic of glitter and greasepaint, and over a neon blue bodysuit and white apron she was fitted with a foot-long black dildo "tail" strapped to her backside – all this from a woman who made a passionate escape from East Germany. The next day after school I rode my bike straight to Tower Records and purchased her only U.S. release to date; a four-song e.p. called

The Nina Hagen Band. Later that afternoon, Nina Hagen tweaked my colorless teenage existence positively fluorescent.

She was everything my senses, my spirit and my soul were starving for. Somewhere between her grinding satanic bellow and her soul-piercing soprano I got whipped into a state of trance dancing delirium, she kicked in my doors of perception and struck me deeply in an intensely personal, nearly inexplicable way. The raw, unbridled life in her voice

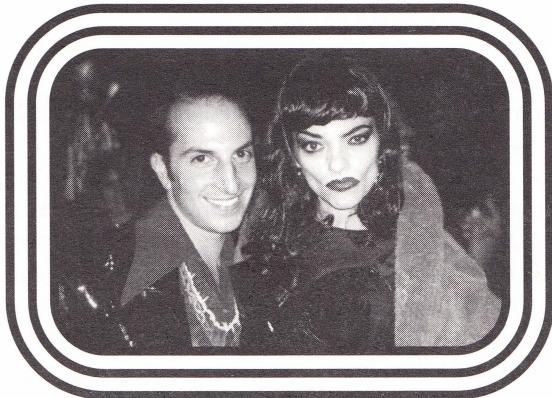
A
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by Matt Maranian

transcended any language barrier. She was pure fireworks, and the rest of my world paled hopelessly by comparison to her. I became absolutely spellbound by this exotic, otherworldly creature and spent a significant percentage of my teen years staring deeply into the pupils of her chestnut brown eyes in the glossy photos from the pages of *Creem*. My low S.A.T. scores and C-average in high school were testament to the many, many classroom hours I consumed fantasizing about the private, perfect moments we could share

together. Dream date scenarios. I took German in high school for the sole reason that I might one day speak to her in her native tongue, and gave encomiastic oral reports on her both in my German and English classes. When I caught word of a rare U.S. concert date, I begged my parents to allow me to take two days off from school, and I took a Greyhound to Hollywood to catch a life-altering show at The Whisky.

Although I managed to graduate High School and lead a reasonably balanced



and healthy adult life, I never did quite shake Nina off. I continued to carry my torch; I paid ridiculous prices for her import CDs, dutifully clipped photos from magazines, and never missed a rare Los Angeles performance.

Fast forward to a strange, fluke, fortuitous evening that unfolded in January of '95 during The American Music Awards at The Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles. I'm occasionally given tickets to big, flashy music award shows, and while they're invariably forgettable and represent only the lowest common denominator of American music, I get the opportunity to wear all those impractical clothes I buy in anticipation of living a glamorous life. This evening's show was particularly mediocre – even with Prince's pyrotechnics display, but I did sit just eight seats away from Linda Thompson, an ex-*Hee Haw* cast member – my very favorite TV show – which I must admit was really exciting.

As the show concluded, my friend Carol and I made our way from our seats up the jam-packed aisle and into the lobby headed for the party entrance, fraught with security. We stopped for a moment to peruse the crowd pouring through the theater and out onto the sidewalk; the usual sea of tuxedoes, bad beaded dresses, and discernably underdressed rap artists. Just as we began to move on, Carol fixed her gaze just over my shoulder. Her eyes

widened. "Woah," she whispered, "Look at her..."

I turned around and there she was, not more than four feet in front of me. She stood nearly six feet tall in Vivienne Westwood black satin and rhinestone skyscraper platform heels, legs and waist wrapped skin tight in a floorlength black stretch-velvet dress, topped by a black vinyl bullet bra with a hot pink fun-fur

chubby
draped over

SHE TOSSED THE BUTT TO THE GROUND AND CRUSHED IT

her shoulders. Her real hair was concealed under a long, jet-black wig, and she carried a bright lime green backpack over one arm. She was a staggering sight.

UNDER ONE SATIN PLATFORM HEEL. I RESISTED MY IMPULSE TO DIVE TO THE PAVEMENT, SAVING THAT BUTT TO PLACE UNDER MY PILLOW. IN RETROSPECT, I WISH I HAD.

I nearly fell to the floor.

This was the last event on earth I'd expect to find Nina Hagen. Except for the occasional second look she'd generate from someone who undoubtedly figured she was a drag queen, the crowd moved past her without acknowledgment – clearly unaware of who she was – making their way to the Joey Lawrence worship circle or trying desperately to get a glimpse of Lori Morgan. Much to my

delight Nina was absent of an entourage and instead was oddly paired with a nondescript middle-aged man in a business suit. They seemed to be making motions to leave.

Not about to let her slip through my fingers I bolted forward in an effort to make contact. Real time wound itself to hyperspeed. My body temperature dropped at least twenty degrees and everything but Nina evaporated from my field of vision – my breathing was forced and labored in my best effort to maintain a heartbeat. I tried desperately to form intelligible sentences and managed to introduce myself and initiate uneasy and awkward conversation. To my relief, she was pleasingly approachable and unusually friendly.

"So are you going to the party?" I stammered.

"What party?" Nina replied in her

lilting German accent.

"There's an after-show party in the building next door, don't you have tickets?"

"No, I don't," she said – and continued with words that truly twisted my reality – "can I go with you?"

The air around me was suddenly swimming with the little blue sparkley spots I see when I stay in the sunlight too long. *She asked if she could go to the*

party with me. The man she came with said he'd rather skip it, and asked her if she could find a ride home.

"Will you take her home?" He was asking me. After what amounted to less than seven minutes of dialogue, this man, whose name I didn't even know, was asking me if I, Matt Maranian, could take Nina Hagen, my primary object of worship for the past fourteen years of my life, home. His question was not a difficult one for me to answer, and surprisingly, Nina wasn't even slightly averse to the idea of being pawned off on a total stranger.

"Trust me," I told him, "You couldn't put her in better care."

"Oh, Good." the man said, and he left. As simple as that.

So there we were. If the meteoric impact of simply bearing witness to her wasn't enough I was now thrown into this disorienting set of circumstances, and thrust not only with the responsibility of showing Nina Hagen a good time, but also seeing that she gets home safely. My knees were shaking so hard I had to steady my footing and lock them in place to keep from gyrating across the floor. We stood in pregnant silence. She's my ward, I kept thinking.

"Let's step outside for a cigarette,"
Nina said.

We moved out to the sidewalk. Tuxedos continued to move out of the theater in droves, valet parking attendants buzzed and jumped, cars passed, and I stood there with Nina Hagen feeling like the nucleus of the universe. We made small talk that I was too awestruck to follow, and after she finished

her cigarette – the filter stained with black lipstick – she tossed the butt to the ground and crushed it under one satin platform heel. I resisted my impulse to dive to the pavement, saving that butt to place under my pillow.

I was ready to explode. I couldn't let another moment pass without communicating to her how she's rocked my world, that she hits me hard – and I wanted desperately to reach her just as powerfully.

"Nina, may I speak to you privately for a moment?"

"Yes..." she said

I pulled her over to an empty corner of the sidewalk. I turned to her, and with both hands I grabbed her firmly by the shoulders and looked as deep into the pupils of her eyes as I did into the pictures from the pages of *Creem* – I think I even freaked her out a little.

"Nina," I spoke with great conviction, "I must tell you that your music has touched me as profoundly as music can possibly touch a person. Our meeting tonight is not accidental, our paths were meant to cross..." I slowly became aware that I was behaving like an absolute lunatic, but I considered who I was dealing with and threw caution to the wind – I had two feet firmly planted in the moment.

"And you know what," she added without missing a beat, cracking a knowing smile and dropping the register of her voice at least twelve octaves to her

signature, trans-channeling-esque growl, “It’s gonna get even better...”

This spirited reply to such maniacal gushing – and especially her knowing smile – was some indication that we were operating close to the same wavelength. She got it.



me: *this is it, this is the dream date, it's happening now.*

As we made our way back into the lobby, some guy Nina knew named Irwin materialized, who wanted to join us. I didn't mind, he was very quiet and seemed like a nice person, plus he would give my friend Carol someone to talk to because I had all but ditched her. The party was filled to capacity and as Nina took my arm it hit me how perfectly we complimented each other; I too was wearing platform shoes and black vinyl; we were a handsome couple.

Like becoming lucid in a dream, I wanted to test the waters. As we maneuvered through the noisy crowd I gently grabbed hold of her arm and pulled her to a stop. She turned to me. "Nina" I said, "Let's OHM!"

Without question or comment she took a deep inhalation. With our eyes slightly closed, together we chanted a loud, resonant "*Oooooooooooooauuu*

uuuuuuummmmmmmmm...” Party goers sipped champagne and nibbled *hors d’oeuvres* trying not to look our way.

“Oooooooooooooaaaaaaaaaaauuuuuuu ummmmmmmmmmm...” We chanted again—it was starting to kick in.

“Oooooooooooooaaaaaaaaaaauuuuuuu ummmmmmmmmmm...” A third and final time.

“Namaste,” Nina said to me, putting her palms together and bowing her head. “Namaste,” I said, and bowed back.

I got Nina a drink and we found an empty cocktail table just on the edge of the dance floor. I failed to impress her with my German and was having great difficulty just managing with English, but I did calm myself enough to engage in a lengthy chat. We got pleasantly toasted on vodka, and took drags off the same cigarette just like we were in junior high. (I don’t smoke, but such an intimate act as the sharing of a single cigarette was an experience I couldn’t possibly resist.)

There was a band on stage doing ‘50s and ‘60s covers fit for a wedding reception and no one was dancing. I asked Nina if she’d like to dance, and in a moment straight from the pages of Cinderella she gave me her hand and I led her to the center of what seemed like acres of empty space—I was standing in the middle of an empty dance floor with Nina Hagen as hundreds looked on. Then something took us over. Nina and I started moving in a free-form, Isadora Duncanish sort of way, a style completely inappropriate for the doo-wop tunes being performed from the stage. Flailing our arms and squatting to the floor, we twisted and dipped—looking square into

each others eyes—and, when I stopped to think about it, making absolute fools of ourselves. But I didn’t care who was staring and I didn’t care what anyone thought, I was seizing this moment for all it was worth.

When the bandleader asked for couples to jump on stage and “shake their thang,” Nina pulled me right up there with her and we watusied ourselves into another dimension. As the sax player started in on a wild solo, Nina spontaneously grabbed the mike and began wailing to a perplexed audience as band members looked curious and annoyed. Unfortunately, as Nina quickly discovered, the mike was dead—killing the drama of her impromptu performance. Red-faced, Nina and I jumped off the stage—wobbling on our platform shoes—and ran to our chairs giggling like teenagers. Being publicly humiliated on a stage before a crowd of hundreds somehow brings two people closer together.

We slow-danced too. And as my hands rested on the velvet wrapped around her tight, narrow waist, I looked to the ceiling, I closed my eyes—stifling my screams—and again and again in my head I repeated *I’m slow dancing with Nina Hagen—I can’t believe this is happening...*

Just as I was about to leave my body I was jerked back to earth by the instruction from the bandleader on stage.

“Now, I want everyone to hold your partner very close...” he said. Nina and I moved closer.

“...and I want you to pucker your lips...” I swallowed my heart. Nina lowered her eyelids and gently pouted her

full mouth.

“...and kiss your partner on the cheek.” I kissed her cheek, and she, mine—and she kissed me again on the other side, unprompted.

After our last dance I escorted Nina to the ladies room and I reveled in the series of fantastical events that had taken place over the past few hours. I needed to splash my face with icewater. Nina returned, the party began to wind down, and it was now close to midnight. The slow dances, the drinks, the chit chat and the cigarettes all came to a close. Her friend Irwin ended up driving her home, and it was imperative that I sit down in a quiet place. I had no idea how exhausting a dream date could be.

We hugged goodbye and kissed each other again on the cheek, and agreed that we’d stay in touch. Nina gave me the number of where she was staying, “Call me! Before noon is best!” And Carol and I headed for my car.

I did call. And we spoke once or twice. A couple of times I came home to the most thrilling messages I’ve ever received on my answering machine. But Nina is off and about and never stays in any one place for long. Soon after she left for Paris I think, or Spain, to finish her record. I, too, had a life to get back to and the whole experience all became very “*Purple Rose of Cairo*.”

In spite of her knowing smile, I’m sure Nina had no idea what that night really meant to me. I replay the scenes over and over in my head, still slightly incredulous that fate delivered Nina Hagen into my life for a whole evening, all to myself. I got my dream date! ×

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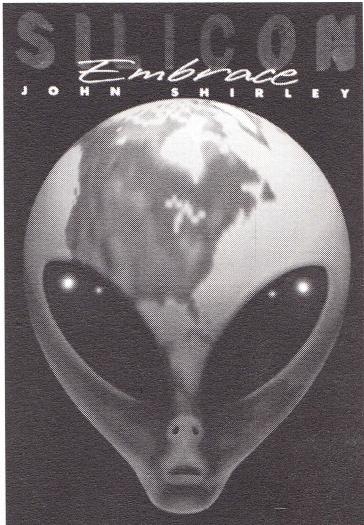
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AND ALL THAT MONKEY BUSINESS!

by Kristy O'Rell

"A LONG TIME AGO, A MONKEY WAS SHOT INTO SPACE. AFTER HIS SAFE RETURN TO EARTH, HE OPENED HIS OWN BUSINESS. HE CALLED IT MONKEY BUSINESS!"

IT'S EASY TO INCREASE YOUR PARANOIA with a driver who really likes "taking routes not ordinarily taken" through a desolate sector of Oakland, CA at night. A warehouse party given by a local graphic artist is our destination, but however cute our invitation is, its direction map is really crude and confusing. No matter; our driver is none other than J.

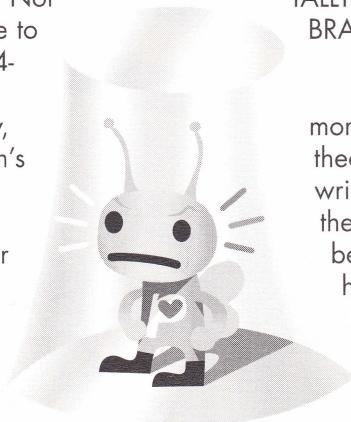
otto Seibold of "Mr. Lunch" fame (*Mr. Lunch Takes a Plane Ride* [1993], *Mr. Lunch Borrows A Canoe* [1994], *Free Lunch* [1996] Viking Press), the 36-year-old illustrator-cum-children's book author who is more like a souped-up teenager on speed than a sensitive, sophisticated artist. As we're winding our way around Oaktown's illuminated Lake Merritt (we're getting closer, thank god), J. otto and wife/collaborator Vivian Walsh are taking turns describing their day at a bizarre Catholic baptism in tandem with press updates on their lat-

est book, *Free Lunch*. I'm trying desperately to get hold of my wits because the conversation is full of so much... JOTTOWORLD... that I feel if I start going into a fit of laughter again I'll miss a classic retort to Religion and Publishing, or a mixture of both. It's hard enough to distract myself from the couple's two sleeping daughters, two year-old Theadora and ten month old Amelia. I'm mesmerized by Theadora's bitchin' snore.

Funny. My sentimental bends toward literature never got past much more than "gee, that was a

pleasant reading experience." Except for children's books. I go apeshit over the good stuff, and I must emphasize *good*. Not all kid's books manage to satisfy both a restless 4-year-old and a cynical 28-year-old. Obviously, there's enough children's authors who create gushy, sugar-coated-cream-puff fantasies for young 'uns that, while they might get the parental seal of approval, are crappy meanderings and generally contain some sort of painful Christian lesson. That's no good book. Kooky art and satire with a provocative message... YES! These are stories that transcend a real age and generation gap, that remain on our bookshelf throughout our entire lifetime. Very few authors have had the genius to create such work. It's a balance between intellectual insight, curiosity towards the human spirit and best of all, *not taking things so seriously*. The story must strike the reader with color, imagination, innocence and inspiration and at the same time belie a sense of irony, dry wit and serious social commentary to be considered quality work. Know what I'm saying? I'm not talking about Barney, Johnny Appleseed, Pocahontas. . I'm talking Lewis Carroll, Dr. Seuss and J. otto.

* * *



"USING A SUPER-COMPUTER, A GIFT FROM HIS FRIENDS AT THE SPACE PROGRAM, HE ACCIDENTALLY MADE SOMETHING BRAND NEW."

J. otto and Walsh use more instinct than learned theory when it comes to writing their books, hence the reason their work has been hailed as "hip, hyperkinetic children's books" from the prestigious graphic design journal

Upper & Lower Case.

J. otto's post-modern, almost Constructivist illustrations rely on warm, muted colors that emphasize browns, reds, blues and golds more than neons or the primaries. The result is reminiscent of those post-World War II/nuclear family kiddie books with the nice paper covers that Baby Boomers grew up on. Though J. otto is almost a generation too late to be a Boomer, he creates characters and environments that are retro in spirit yet identifiable to our present-day world. And with Walsh's flair for drollery, their efforts have been enjoyed by thousands of readers. The congested, chaotic, media-drenched landscapes of Mr. Lunch (an opportunistic dog working as a professional bird chaser) and Space Monkey (an astronaut-turned-industrial tycoon) are places you truly enjoy visiting. Even Matt Groening gives the couple

props, claiming, "Take it from a dad who knows: The *Mr. Lunch* books are not only hilarious, they hold up to repeat – and I mean repeat – bedtime reading."

"AFTER A WHILE, A MAN CAME ALONG PULLING A WAGON. PENELOPE WATCHED AS HE PUT THE MYSTERIOUS OBJECT IN HIS WAGON AND TURNED AROUND TO GO HOME. SHE FOLLOWED HIM."

"We're still dummies... we just got a PowerBook so we feel like we're now advanced," Says J. otto. "We're gonna check out other people's sites [on the Internet], like if there's an Exxon Web Page. Wherever it says "Exxon" change it to "Monkey Business"... we can copy their files, right?"

J. otto is giddy about free access on the Net, that's for damn sure. We're hanging in his studio, drinking some Henry's (the new RED blend!) and discussing his JOT-TOWORLD website. So far he's managed to snag a diehard Mr. Lunch fan - HotWired's Web Monkey diva, Jillo - to help with the design, links and other technical matters. By no means a card-carrying member to the the artistic dignitati, J. otto isn't stupid. The inevitability of Mr. Lunch and Space Monkey floating through cyberspace is just as vital to J. otto's future plans of bringing his work into schoolrooms as it is seeing

Space Monkey rocket through space in *Monkey Business*. What's more, J. otto's enthusiasm towards the Net has Viking Press re-evaluating its focus to the extent the huge publishing venture wants a stronger online presence to support its children's book roster. "[Viking's] Children's Department basically learned how to turn on computers about two years ago, but they're getting email and all that now," J. otto muses. "Through books and research they're getting a better understanding of Web sites, so they're pretty much into what I'm doing."

By no means is J. otto to be considered an artist... yet. Though *Mr. Lunch Takes A Plane Ride*, (the couple's first book) sold over 15,000 copies with *Mr. Lunch Borrows A Canoe* selling 17,000 copies and counting, J. otto still has to keep his day job. "OF COURSE I still have to do freelance work to make a living!" he exclaims. "I'd love to just write kid's books. But as I'm trying to kill my illustration career it's made me more popular." He's chuckling again. J. otto does that a lot – laugh, chortle, gleefully giggle. You'd think he has a gas tank strapped to his chest or something. Never to be spotted wearing a tie, J. otto prefers khaki shorts and jerseys and I can easily surmise comfort is his priority with fashion. He's a tall dude, with a football player build, a human jukebox full of jokes, zany anecdotes, sloppy



imitations of personalities and, overwhelmingly, a *Goofball Extremis*. As we move back to the topic of *Monkey Business* and the fact Mr. Lunch is missing from the book, J. otto takes a Machiavellian outlook:

"It's like NASA's experiment with the chimp. If the rocket blew up, you only lose the monkey. We had the same concept that if we don't sell a whole lot of books, we lose the monkey!"

"SPACE MONKEY WISHED THE ASSEMBLY LINE COULD GO FASTER, BUT HE ALSO BELIEVED IN FACTORY SAFETY."

After spending the last four years in New York hobnobbing with illustrator pals like Richard McGuire (author of *The Orange Book*) and scoring their deal with Viking, J. otto and Vivian began to get homesick and returned to San Francisco with their daughters and dogs last Fall. Arguably, San Francisco's art coteries may not garner quite the attention as New York or LA's luminous circles, but J. otto says he couldn't care less. "[Living in San Francisco] is way better. I never really liked many illustrators to begin with; in general, they want to be artists and they're a drag! They're dissatisfied with being illustrators, and besides, it's usually shop talk with them and it's boring."

"We would have stayed in New York if we didn't have kids. I mean, it was OK with one kid; one arm for holding baby, one arm for hitting people. But with a second child, it just doesn't work. New York is high level ambition. I mean, the first thing you ask somebody is "what do you do?" and then you judge them. With pets it's the same thing. Everybody has like, cheetahs (laughs) or a pure-bred dog flown in from Iceland or somewhere like that. We would go to the park with

our dogs and see super-models with their, you know, Alsatians. But then three weeks later the dog would be gone or replaced by some other trendy breed. That's New York."

J. otto spends his days between home and his modest, third floor studio in San Francisco's South of Market district, strategically located near a junkie basement nightclub and The Balloon Lady. His work schedule is a loose one; he'll spend the morning with Viv and kids and sometime around noon (no particular time, of course) cruise over to the studio. Vivian works mostly at home on the PowerBook and has been chiefly responsible for the JOT-



TOWORLD homepage.

The studio gets most of its light during the day through the overhead skylight, particularly in the late afternoon. So much of what's in this studio is what makes J. otto's mind tick. There's a bookshelf full of various architectural and art books,

contemporary and vintage kid's books, funky manuals and even a few old field guides to birds. ("After writing about bird-chasing, you get an itch to do it yourself. We hope to someday do a book called *Mr. Lunch's Guide To Birds*," J. otto says.)

The white walls are covered with posters, press clippings, numerous toys and early prints of Space Monkey, Mr. Lunch, and lesser-known characters that co-exist in JOTTOWORLD. Copies of a few Japanese projects that were commissioned to J. otto several years ago are scattered throughout the room, and he confides he's still not entirely



sure what his characters were saying in the short animated piece he had done in Tokyo during that period. The CD shelf has a distinctive music collection of rock, experimental, you name it – everything from Ween and They Might Be Giants to The Residents and Brian Dewan.

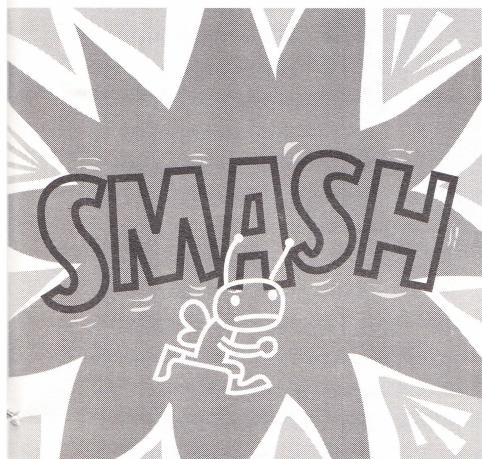
Mr. Lunch refrigerator magnets, Swatch samples, keychains comprise a little JOTTOWORLD shrine in the corner of the room. WHAT LEAD TO ALL THIS?

Growing up in Martinez, a Bay

we'd have trenchcoats on. We would go in to stores stealing every *MAD Magazine*... LOTS of stuff. I later made friends that never stole in their life so they were freaked out when I told them. It was like I killed

thinking, 'that's cool! I'm gonna do that!' It's a process I guess... at the same time I had a personal creed that if I was ever busted for copying somebody else I would present my case 'But look! See how well I

"New York is high level ambition. The first thing you ask somebody is 'what do you do?' and then you judge them. With pets it's the same thing. Everybody has like, cheetahs or a pure-bred dog flown in from Iceland or somewhere like that."



Area suburb nestled between salt-water inlets, golden hills and oil refineries, I guess a kid in the '60s would become a little, shall I say, daring? "We were crazy," J. otto recalls. "We would ride our bikes from Martinez to Sun Valley Mall in Concord. In the dead of summer

someone."

"I got thrown out of class for drawing on desks, but no, I never took any art classes," he continues. "I just did it for fun. Even at Clorox (J. otto worked in R&D division in the mid-'80s) I spent half my time designing laboratories and half my time drawing work announcements. This was a place with some 500 employees and it seemed like every week someone was having a new kid. (I would be the one drawing the "Congratulations!" poster with a picture. I hate seeing the stuff I had drawn then. It makes me feel so precarious, like, 'that's what I thought? This is what I did?'"

"I have a lot of influences. I catch on to new stuff and really try to read up on as much as I can. I used to just rip off everything I saw,

understand your work?' If I brought something new to the idea, it was OK. I could alleviate my guilt."

J. otto met Vivian while they both lived in San Francisco in the early '80s. At the time, he was fooling around as a drummer in a rock band called Love Circus with his brother and a few other good-for-nothings (my boyfriend included – won't fill you in on the sordid details, but that's my connection to J. otto). Of course, when I first asked J. otto about Vivian's background, he said, "Vivian was a professional ice skater. She studied under Dorothy Hamill... at the Institute of Ice Skating... in Alaska." When he saw I was being reeled in he couldn't hold it and apologized for his fib, adding "It's a published lie. We were talking about it, say-

ing Vivian needed a *mystique*. Ice skating seemed to be a good career." Viv had *really* been working in the publishing business as well as putting out a Xerox-copy 'zine called *Bagazine*... "That was her scene," recalls J. otto. "She had her mom write articles, which was great. But publishing is her background and now with the kids and her sensibility... it works well."

Before they signed with Viking, they first went with a relatively well-known Italian publisher called Rizzoli, but it didn't last long. "[Rizzoli] wouldn't let us do what we wanted. They just kept saying, 'You can't do that. You can't do that. Not for your first book.' It was like every conversation was built to keep us down. So we said screw it. We chose Viking because they were publishing the Maira Kalman books (the *Max* series) and Lane Smith (*Stinky Cheese Man*). So we knew they were putting out some good work, not merely things like *The Rainbow Pony*. (laughs). They gave us total autonomy. We turned in both Mr. Lunch books on discs and they didn't make any editorial changes to either." Was it just then pure luck for the two? "It's totally scientific. It either resonates or it doesn't. At the same time, Vivian's pregnancy with Theodora played a major role in the process. When Theodora was born, I had about four pages to go; I was racing

Vivian on deadline time! So we kinda looked at making Mr. Lunch as our transition to being parents without any of the screaming reaction. We thought about it in those terms; the book was dedi-

force observes. "I thought for awhile that Snoopy was King of Japan, but he's been dead for years. Kids aren't into Snoopy. Currently, by pure chance, there's a hole in the dog icon market in Japan... we

hope to fill that void!" How about a Saturday morning or prime-time 'toon? J. otto is

realistic, as he can allow himself to be.

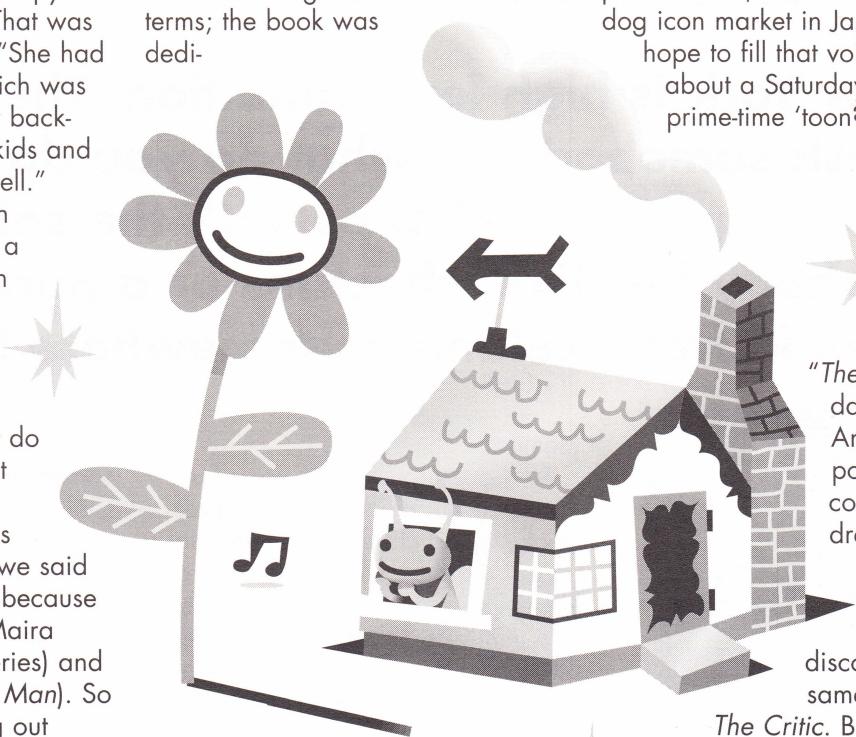
"*The Simpsons* is daunting. Animation proposals have come in and I dream about it for days, but of course I wake up by discovering it's the same guy who did

The Critic. But we finally hired an entertainment lawyer – the same one as Matt Groening's – and she's been able to put things in perspective."

And?

"We want some weird, pony-tailed animator to take an interest in us and we'll give him the green light."

You can send raving fan emails to J. otto at: otto@sirius.com. X



cated to Theodora. Then the second book to Amelia."

Now that there's discussion for licensing and merchandising Mr. Lunch (Sony is one player), what lies ahead for that bird-lovin' dog and his quirky crew of JOT-TOWORLD-ites? More additions to the J. otto family? Not quite, but wouldn't it be nice to be in control of a new canine figurehead? "Snoopy's dead," Mr. Lunch's life

1912: First microscope introduced to the United States by Dr. Raelph Beuendeuk, Boston surgeon emigre, who uses it to entertain local politicians in his study. One journalist, invited to a private showing, hails as "spectacular and revolutionary" his first view of "an eerie time-lost landscape concealed in a wad of common lint."

January 7, 1913: First microscope-related editorial cartoon appears in Baltimore *Stentorian*, depicting Mayor peering at Key to the City. Caption: "Egad! How will this Monster fit in the Lock?"

1915-1921: Amateur microscopy craze sweeps the nation. Considered too long-lived to be a fad, the proliferation of microscope salons eventually comes to be seen as a menace to progress and industry. Anonymous leaflets decry the captivation of American ingenuity by "these tiny Frontiers that can never be breached by Pick or Rail, nor settled by any Pioneer, no matter how indomitable his Spirit!"

May 16, 1922: Outspoken members of grassroots movement, Christians Against Minutiae, present petitions to the White House, citing the microscope as "an instrument of the Devil, by which the innocent have been familiarized with the nether regions of

depravity and afflicted with blindness, cataract and myopia from staring at the heads of lucifers, pins, and body lice."

League of Lens Grinders proclaims this "A dark day indeed for liberty."

December 25, 1924: From federal prison, Clovis Dauber issues the statement that he will no longer celebrate another holiday until amoebas have been granted their inalienable rights and allotted Federal reservations where they might "teem in peace."

1929: FBI confiscating black-market Dutch "Leeuwenhoeks" in increasing numbers; clamp-down on "hoekleggers" avails little.

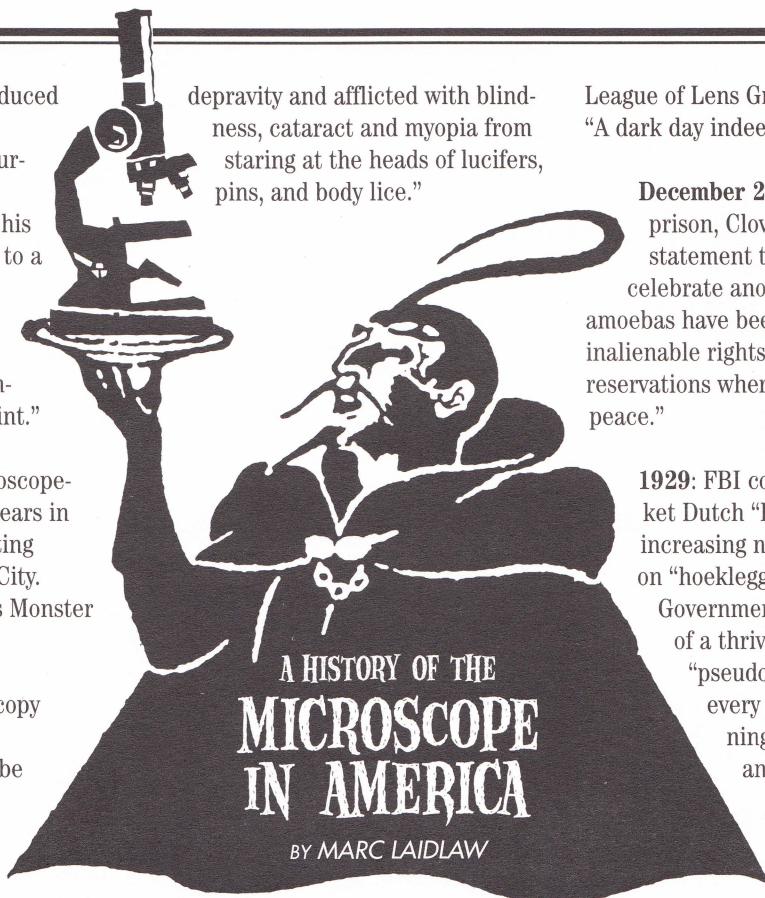
Government admits to existence of a thriving underworld with "pseudopods extending to every level of society, beginning with the smallest and lowest."

1930-1935: Heyday of illicit clubs known as "Peek-easies." Mafia promotes brisk trade in glass slides, cover slips, and gentian violet.

April 1, 1924: April Fool's Rebellion in Chicago. Clovis Dauber, chief insurrectionist and author of *The Paramecium Manifesto*, incites mob violence by describing in lurid detail the "mass of tiny and defenseless creatures which daily are trod upon by even the most downtrodden of masses." He is referring to protozoa which dwell in cracks of streets and sidewalks.

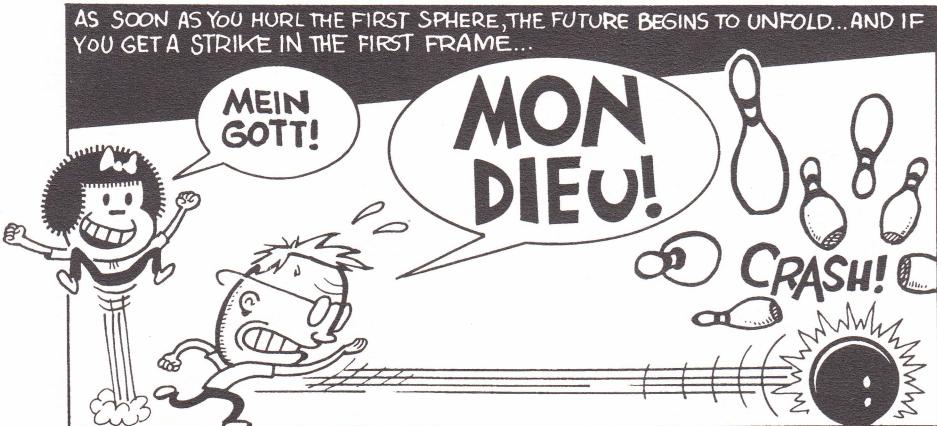
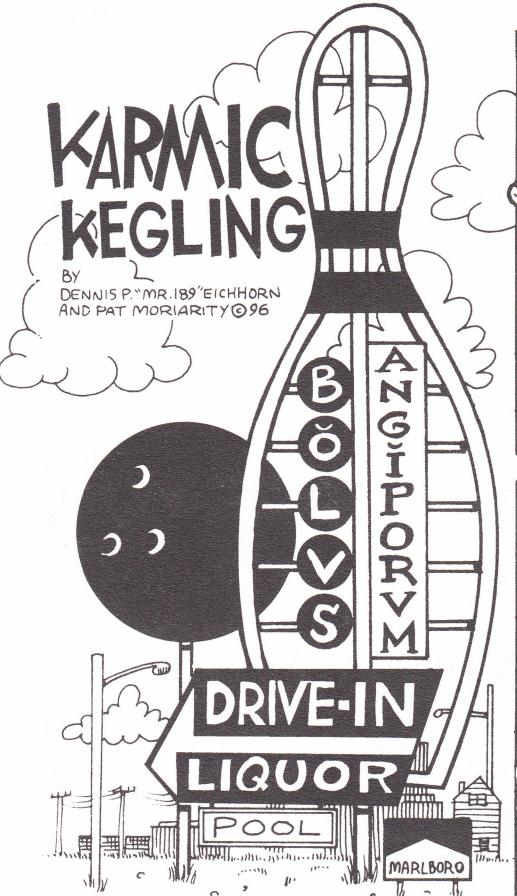
November 12, 1924: Passage of the Microscopic Prohibition Act. The Little

1937-Present: The Age of the Microscope. **X**

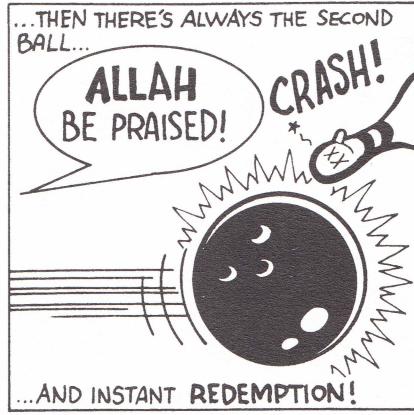
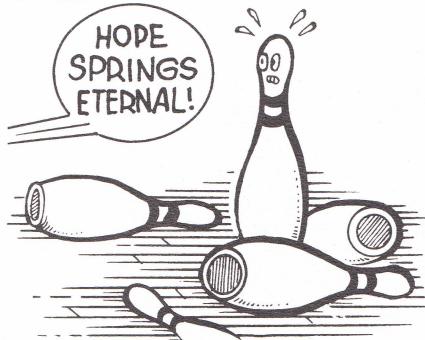


KARMIC KEGLING

BY DENNIS P. "MR. 189" EICHHORN AND PAT MORIARTY © 96



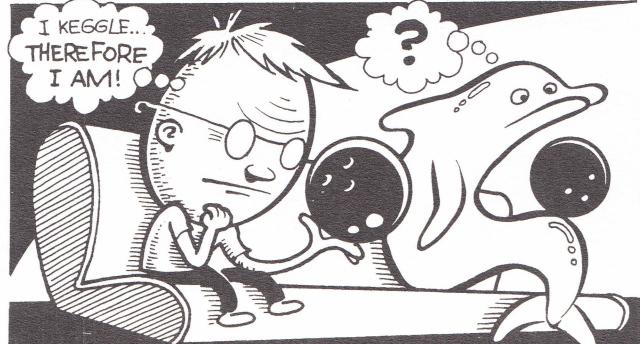
AND, IF YOU DON'T KNOCK ALL THE PINS DOWN WITH YOUR FIRST CAST OF THE GLOBE...



SURE, IT'S ALWAYS A TEMPTATION TO UNLEASH YOUR AGGRESSION...



JUST REMEMBER, NOT EVERY SPECIES CAN GO BOWLING!

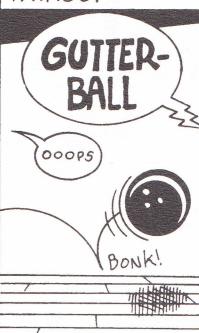


YEP, THIS PASTIME HAS GOT IT ALL!

SHORT-TERM-GOAL FULFILLMENT...

...AN IDEAL TO PURSUE...

...AND OCCASIONAL PATHOS!



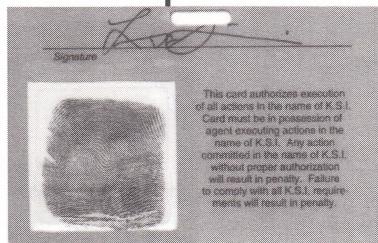
YOU NEED AN OPPOSABLE THUMB TO DO IT PROPERLY!

FINALLY, AFTER ALL IS SAID AND DONE:



COM MUN ITY

by David Pescovitz



Don't be paranoid, but you may be part of one of Lisa Schilling's works of art. You see, this 27-year-old from San Francisco orchestrates exquisite art-hoaxes with the general public as her medium of choice.

During the day, Lisa works in a really cool café. But I wonder if that's just another one of her conceptual art pieces. In any case, Lisa did have yummy coffee and cookies waiting for me in her parlor when I came over for a chat about her project called KSI, in which a North Oakland community became unwitting participants. – David Pescovitz

Tell us about KSI.

It started around January of 1994. Betsy Kenyon, my collaborator, and I needed to give the focus of the piece some kind of authority, and we needed it to sound like an organization that

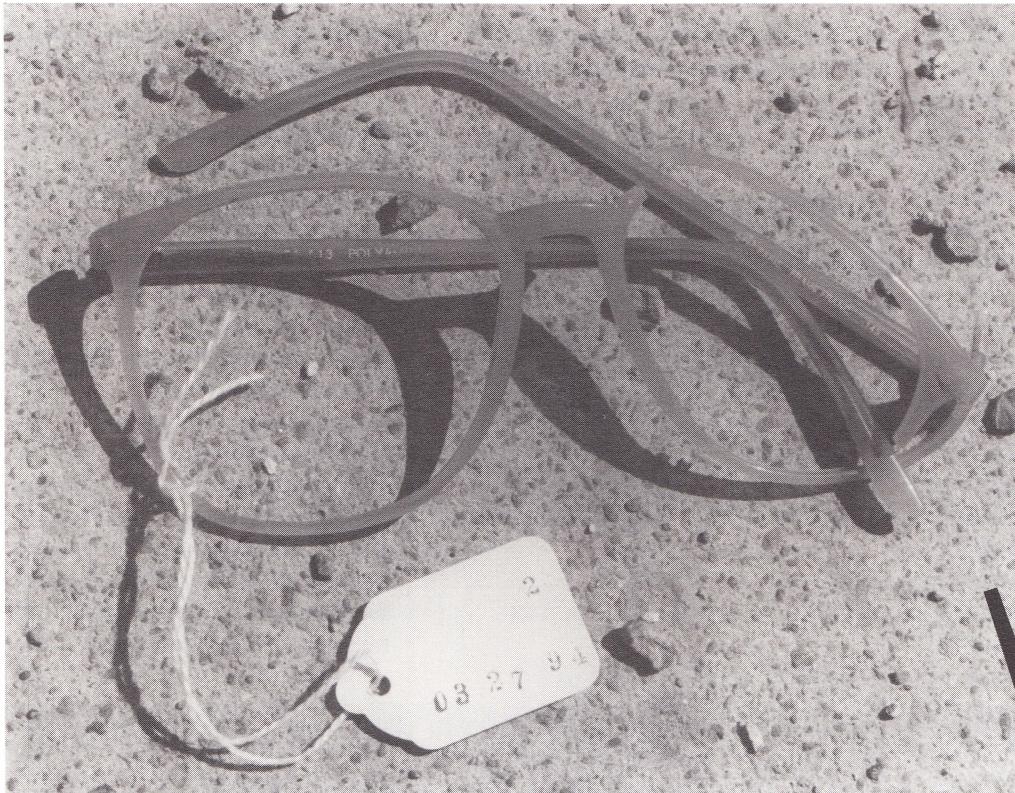
"Theater takes place all the time, wherever one is. And art simply facilitates persuading one this is the case."

– John Cage

could be more than two people – possibly a legion, possibly just an office, maybe something in between. It really just stands for Kenyon and Schilling, and the 'I' can mean 'incorporated,' or 'institution,' or anything.

What did KSI do?

Betsy and I had been offered a show at a very small community gallery and we were unsure what we wanted to do. So we read the charter of the gallery and it stated over and over that this was a community-based gallery – that they did work with, about, and, in some ways, for the community. Basically the gallery was there by the grace of the community with free rent, that sort of thing. We decided that what we needed to do was find out more about the community that we were supposed to act within. The best way to really get to know the community



WAT CH

that we were working in was to watch them in some way.

What community was this?

It was a funny little community in the North Oakland area. For our purposes, we decided that it was the strip between Broadway and Rockridge on College Avenue, which is where the gallery was. It's a mixture of both small businesses and residences and a predominantly white, middle class community – but I think that's more of late. We started to notice that the people in the community were very quiet. We also realized that were we to interview them or to talk to them about who they were or what they did, they probably wouldn't be ➤

very open or honest.

So what did you decide to do?

During our walks, we noticed that there was a lot of debris in the area. It wasn't necessarily trash, but it was definitely an accumulation of 'objects.' And there were so many of these objects that we started to wonder why they were there, how they had come to be there and who they belonged to. So we started collecting them. We'd go on Sunday at about 7 AM, looking very official in matching blue overalls and carrying canvas bags, and we would collect objects that were between the door-steps and the street. We limited ourselves because we decided that the objects in those particular areas were not

object was and where we found it. For example, #73: Salem cigarette butts with

decided then that we would finally make contact with the community.

How did you contact them?

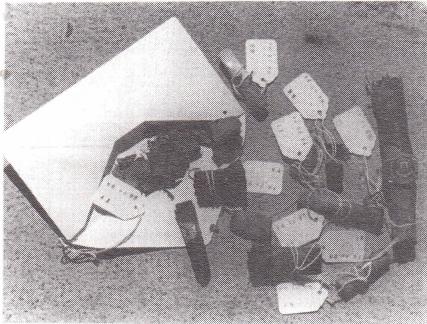
We wanted to do it in their style of communication and we had noticed that the whole area is completely littered with flyers – flyers for piano lessons, Spanish tutors, people who want to get summer jobs, plane tickets for sale, everything. So KSI飞ered the neighborhood.

What was on the flyers?

They said things like 'Is this your lighter?', 'Is this your lavender eye-glass case?', with a photo of the object, a description of where it was found, and our phone number. We also put up general flyers that said

ARE YOU THE CIGAR SMOKER?

are you INSANE???



do you have any other
pertinent information?

contact
KSI at 415-642-0831

**"IT EVENTUALLY SEEMED TO ME THAT ALMOST EVERYBODY IN THE COMMUNITY
WAS HIDING SOMETHING. WE HADN'T REALIZED IT AT FIRST, BUT WE HAD
REALLY UPSET THEIR LITTLE BALANCE, THE SORT OF VEIL THAT THEY HAD."**

necessarily trash – the street itself had trash receptacles everywhere. So we just assumed that anything that is not in the trash is, in a way, a member of the community. We amassed this collection of objects that we tagged and labeled, and we kept a journal of where we found them and when.

What was written on the tags?

The date and a number which corresponded to the journal entry of what the

lipstick found on the corner of College and Clifton.' I'd say we collected probably about 200 objects over the course of five months. We started to find lots of similar items daily – Salem cigarettes with the same color lipstick on them that were put out in the same spot all the time. We really started to wonder who the Salem cigarette smoker is? What does she look like? Does her boss know she smokes? It made me think of all the things that I had lost in my life. So we

'Seeking information. If you have any pertinent information please contact KSI.' We used my voice mail and I became the voice of KSI. (*Sound very official:*) 'Hello you have reached the head office of KSI, however we are unable to answer your call. Please leave all pertinent information after the tone or contact KSI by mail to the following post office box.' Then it went on to say something like 'We would like to thank you in advance for your support of KSI,

where what you know is our business. Have a pleasant day.' Our intention was to have people leave messages that we could catalog. We posted these flyers and we got a lot of hang-ups on the voice mail. But a lot of people left their phone number and asked us to call them back. We quickly decided that we didn't want to do that.

What kind of other response did you get?

Well, that Salem cigarette smoker stopped putting out her cigarettes there. Another woman who contacted us apparently owned this empty building in the community and her insurance company had dropped her for some reason. She was convinced it was because of KSI. Also, a lot of the flyers were ripped down almost immediately after we put them up.

People were angry?

Some people were really pissed. This man named Mr. Clark called over and over and he was furious. We ended up calling him back and admitting to him that this was an art piece. But Mr. Clark just didn't want to know what it really was. He felt the flyers were directed at him and he acted like he was hiding something. Mr. Clark came to represent for us the side of the community that was really quite paranoid. It eventually seemed to me that almost everybody in the community was hiding something. We hadn't realized it at first, but we had really upset their little balance, the sort of veil that they had.

Did anyone ever approach you?

Once we were flyering and a middle-aged woman came up behind us and said 'Ah! So you're the ones doing this,' in this sort of Amish tone. We tried to be very cordial but evasive. She said she had been bringing these flyers home for her husband every week and that he loves them. I suggested that she call the number, and then she walked away.

What happened to the gallery show all this was created for?

Ironically, the gallery had lost their lease. That was OK though because we decided that our piece already had its

Did KSI just "go out of business" after a while?

Frankly, we just lost our steam. I think now or in a couple of years I would be more capable of maintaining KSI and guessing what to expect. But at the time, I was just so ignorant of what the possibilities really were.

What are you up to now?

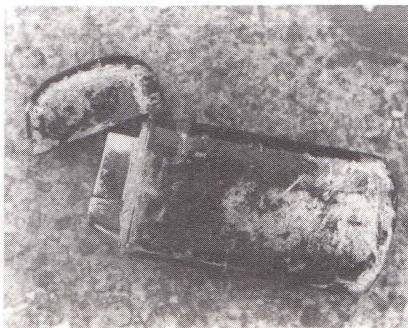
I'm working on a couple of things. For one of them, I'm going through the phone books at the public library and I'm looking up individuals who are strangers to me but whose names *mean* something. Like Brian A. Coward, Braveheart, Goodnature, False, the True family. All the names are virtues or moral judgments really. I'm going to conduct a mail survey to find out if they are 'who they are.'

Your art seems very prank-oriented.

Well, I think there is definitely humor involved. There has to be because otherwise it's just dull for me and it's dull for the audience. I don't think it's about pranks though. I really don't feel like I'm trying to pull something over on people. But more and more I find that people are far more serious than I ever expected. I mean people take themselves *very* seriously, often way too seriously. But humor really is the great equalizer! ✘

David Pescovitz (pesco@well.com) is the co-author of *Reality Check*, published by HardWired books..

IS THIS YOUR LIGHTER?



found at the corner of
College and Broadway.

Any information
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momentum going outside. It was not only community-based, but it had become a part of the community.

ECSTASY FOR



UNDER A DOLLAR

by Mark Frauenfelder

I had a friend named Ralph who bought almost everything he needed from a 99¢ Store. He would brag to me about the deals he'd get on instant coffee, condensed milk, beer, cigarettes, and frozen pizza. "You get a lot for your money at that place," he'd say, handing me a plate of ersatz Oreos. "There are some real bargains there." But the only times I'd consume instant coffee, condensed milk, beer, or frozen pizza were when I was at Ralph's apartment, so I wasn't really able to tell if the 99¢ products were as tasty and wholesome as the kind found in a real supermarket.

There's a 99¢ Store in North Hollywood, about ten minutes' drive from where I live. I've passed by

many times on my way to or from the airport. I've always been tempted to stop in for a look, but since I'm either in a hurry to catch a plane or burned out from traveling, I kept putting off a visit. Then one hot Saturday afternoon in July, I decided the time had come. I got in my car and headed for The 99¢ Store.

On the way, I began wondering how these stores are able to survive. I mean, they've been around for years, but they haven't yet become The \$1.49 Store or The \$1.99 Store. With inflation – even the single-digit kind we've had throughout the '90s – profit margins must shrink every year. Maybe the owners simply fill the shelves with cheaper junk. Ten years from now, The 99¢ Store's inventory will be limited to bags of twist ties, wire coat hangers, and lit-

tle plastic cheese and cracker packages with cheese so old that it's turned white.

Then again, maybe The 99¢ Stores are the dumping grounds for the inevitable spillover of an economic system that must continuously grow larger, producing more, consuming more, or else collapse into economic depression. Perhaps, then, a well-stocked 99¢ Store is a leading indicator of a healthy economy. Instead of "new housing starts" and "durable goods" indices, maybe The Wall Street Journal should be running little charts and graphs indicating the number of 99¢ Stores recently opened across the country.

My train of thought was cut off, however, when I realized that I had suddenly crossed an invisible border into a foreign territory. I started to

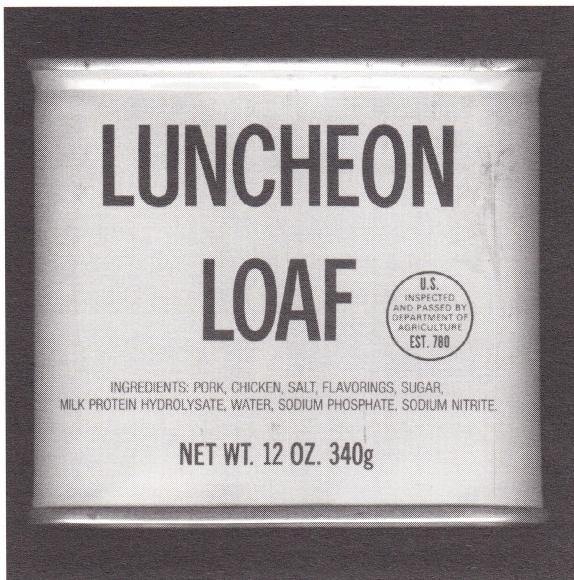
an expedition to the 99¢ store

see people walking around with the "mullet" haircut, the kind that's short and spiky on top and long in the back. This was a sure sign of being in the North Valley. If you ever visit this area, don't expect to find a florist, antique store, eyeglass boutique, or cafe like you would only a few miles to the south. In the North Valley you'll do your shopping at The Shower Door Doctor and Work Boot Warehouse. You'll relax at the Silver Saddle Motel, a crank/crack/fuck motel that sports peeling paint flakes the size of potato chips all over the walls and a weather-beaten, life-size replica of a horse on the roof. Yes, this is 99¢ Store Country.

Before I reached my destination, however, several pretenders to the sub-dollar shopping-market throne tried to lure me into their parking lots. One was called 98¢ Plus, another was called 98¢ Up, and another was called the 98¢ Minimarket. I was momentarily tempted to park my car and visit them, since what could be better than a knock-off of a store that sells knock-off products, but the urge quickly faded. I wanted no part of these stores, for they broke the cardinal rule of sub-dollar shopping by offering *some products that cost more than a dollar*. This, in my book, ruins everything. How dare these establishments try to trick me into giving them business! Any store can be

a *plus* store. K-Mart, Target, and Walmart – they're 98¢-Plus stores; Hell, they're 25¢-Plus stores. Call me a purist, but I insist on the real thing, The 99¢ Store, where I'm promised that absolutely nothing has a price tag over ninety-nine cents. That's the place for me.

When I rolled into the parking lot of the promised land, I saw that the sign on the building read "The



99¢ Only Store." That's telling 'em! The store had a nice big parking lot, and thanks to the metal posts installed around the door, it was impossible for customers to push the shopping carts into the parking lot, thus eliminating the need to maneuver around a bunch of carts stranded by customers eager to hurry home and use or eat their new purchases.

Apparently, visiting The 99¢ Store on a Saturday afternoon is a group activity for many families, because the place was teeming with children. Most of the youngsters were hanging around the candy or toy sections, fighting with their siblings, or running over to their mothers, waving something they'd grabbed from the shelves, whining, "Mom, can we get this?" The store isn't very big, nothing like a Safeway or Target. It's more like the size of a B. Daltons. But it is crammed to the gills with merchandise. The aisles are narrow, and I often found myself waiting for a crowd of shoppers to disperse before I could push my shopping cart somewhere. Plus, there are boxes of inventory stacked on the floor, blocking the aisles and making it even more difficult to get around. Mounted on the ceiling are many rows of naked fluorescent bulbs. The bright lights and the absence of Muzak in the background gives the place a stark and panicked atmosphere. You might even falsely believe that the customers weren't there to buy a shopping experience, judging from the way they were grabbing things off the shelves as fast as they could, loading up their carts with products, and getting the hell out, dragging their crying kids by their wrists. But a cursory examination of the store's offerings convinced me that the joy of shopping is

what this place is all about.

The simple way to describe the inventory of The 99¢ Store, of course, is to say that it consists of products that cost less than a buck. To describe the material used in the manufacture of the products sold there is only slightly more complicated. I came up with a general rule: if you can't eat it or drink it or rub it on your body, then it's probably made of plastic. If not plastic, then cheap stamped metal, the kind of metal that's really shiny, but the shiny part is just a layer that will quickly peel off, exposing a dull gray metal that is probably poisonous. The only thing I remember being made out of wood was a rat trap.

I was hoping to find some really odd toys, the kind with instructions written by Asian people with a poor grasp of the English language, but I was disappointed with the offerings in the store's toy section. It doesn't compare to the toy section of the Dollar Store I went into when I visited my parents in Colorado a couple of years. There I bought a Chinese toy in a plastic bag with a label that said the toy was a "fulchau." What was it? A tube-shaped plastic whistle, with a long spring coming out of it. At the end of the spring, there's a Barbie Doll-lookalike head. And inside the head of the doll, there's a lightbulb. A battery fits inside the whistle. The only thing I can guess about this toy

is that people in China blow the whistle part and light the head and swing it around at parades or celebrations. I bought three of them.

But I had no such luck at The 99¢ Store Toy department. There were a couple of fake Barbie Dolls; an "Ashley," with an unusually broad forehead and Jackie Kennedy far-apart eyes, and a "Rebecca," sort of a younger, chubbier Barbie. But they



weren't worth buying. I did buy a couple of plastic drinking cups shaped like rocket ships, at 2 for 99¢.

Next, I worked my way over to the personal care products department. It was much more interesting. This is where I discovered that there are five categories of brands at The 99¢ Store:

1. Soundalikes Large companies spend a lot of money to make their brand names household words. Many 3rd-rate companies parasitically absorb the strong reputation of established brands names by using similar sounding names. I found "W-Tips" ear swabs ("W" for the wax they'll help you extract?), "Roaster's Choice" instant coffee, and a spray can of "Possession" cologne.

Possession ("Our version of Obsession" states the label) is made by a company called Elite Parfums Paris, but upon reading the fine print I learned that the contents were made in the USA, while the can was made in Finland. (Maybe since Paris is sort of in between the two countries they picked it as the company's "average" location.)

2. Lookalikes The look-and-feel copycat packaging at The 99¢ Store is quite effective at subconsciously fooling you into believing you're getting established brand name products. If I were illiterate I'd probably really believe that the "Deluxe Care" line of baby shampoo, lotion, and powder were Johnson & Johnson products. They've got the typeset, color scheme and container shapes down to a T.

3. Problem Children There are products for sale at The 99¢ Store that have recognizable brand names. But unless the item is small and cheap to begin with, then some-

thing is going to be wrong with it if it is for sale in this store. For example when I discovered a bin overflowing with Arm & Hammer Tartar Control Dental Care toothpaste boxes, a grabbed a few, thinking I was saving a bundle. When I got home and proudly showed my bargain purchase to Carla, she pointed out that the toothpaste was "Importado El Gel con Bicarbonato de Sodio." Yeah, so what, I thought, it is still the real McCoy. Carla then discovered the real problem: "EXP5 96." The stuff had been rotten for a couple of months. The boxes of toothpaste probably sat in a warehouse in Mexico for three or four years, and when they hit the expiration date, they were sold to The 99¢ Store and reshipped to the US.

I also bought a bunch of Reach toothbrushes, since I wear them out really quickly, and when I got home, I noticed a black sticker had been applied to the back of every box. I was able to peel one of the stickers off enough to see a little of what was printed on the box. Just a drawing of the brush with arrows pointing to the brush's unique attributes, and a bar code. Why did they have to cover that up?

I didn't think Jordache was still in business, but they are, and they're licensing their trademark to the distributors of some of the foulest perfumes and colognes my nose has

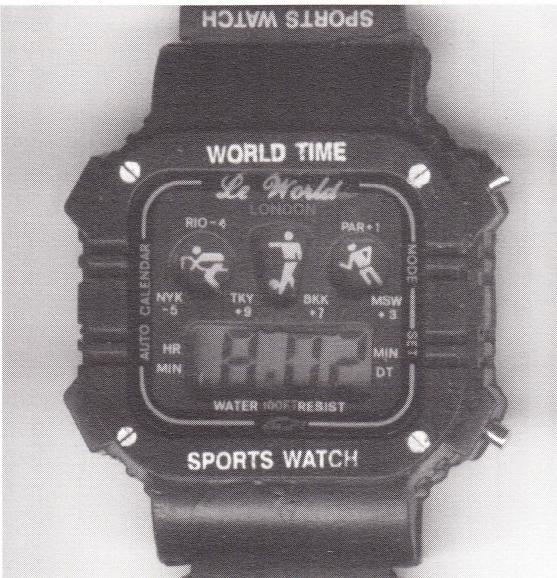
ever had the misfortune of sniffing. I was only able to work my way through three different fragrances – "Wild Potion," "Wild Emotions," and "Fidelity" – before calling it quits. Somebody else with a stronger stomach will have to uncork "Cicero Man," "Night Rhythm," and "Yacht Club," but please make sure I'm not in the same room when it happens.

My favorite problem child prod-

products with brand names that weren't created to look like an established brand, but instead try to look like they belong to a well-known line, only you haven't heard of them before. Food products such as cookies, crackers, tea, are prime candidates for the party crasher brands, sporting English royalty names, Scottish-plaid and curly-cues on the box covers.

5. Nonnames

Finally, we descend to the murky bottom of The 99¢ Store food chain, littered with product packages that don't try to be anything other than containers for the substance they hold. This kind of packaging was popular in the late '70s, during the "generic" product craze. Those stark white boxes and cans with black all-uppercase block lettering screamed from supermarket shelves: "My manufacturer wasted no money on costly packaging design and is passing the savings on to you!" Of course the cost of designing a logo becomes inconsequential when you spread it across millions of units of a particular item, but the ploy worked anyway, for a while at least. The generic brand fad is gone from supermarkets, who have long since moved to packaging their cheap store-brand products in rich brown-and-green colored "designer" packaging. Not so at The 99¢ Store, land of the 15-year time warp. I bought a 12-ounce pull-tab



uct was the Coors baseball bat-shaped beer bottle, a brown glass monstrosity that looked more like a caveman's club. Also, as I recall from my beer drinking days, Coors is unpasteurized, so it needs to be refrigerated or it'll spoil. The Coors clubs at The 99¢ Store were just stacked on an unrefrigerated shelf.

4. Party Crashers Here we have

can of noname-brand Luncheon Loaf, containing pork, chicken, salt, flavorings, sugar, milk protein hydrolysate, water, sodium phosphate, and sodium nitrate. There's no expiration date anywhere. As far as I know, this particular can may have sat on a Safeway shelf in 1978, only to be shipped and stored in a warehouse for 18 years, until popping up in The 99¢ Store. I'm not about to open it and take a guess at the age by examining the contents.

I spent most of my time looking for oddball items. I was hoping to find electrical appliances, but the only things I could find were Jesus nightlights and various sports ball nightlights. What better way to illuminate your bathroom than with the very symbols that illuminate the spirits of "church & football Sunday" folks who shop here?

One of my favorite things was a greeting-card style rack of shrink wrapped floppy disks. For ninety-nine cents, you can buy a word processor, spreadsheet, database program, or dozens of other programs. Are you an executive who wants to move up the corporate ladder? Then buy the "Managing People" program, and learn how to "Get the most out of your employees and yourself and become a better boss." Are you ill, and experiencing physical discomfort? Don't go to a doctor, get a copy of "Non Medical Pain Relief." Looking for a little action? Try "Dare to Dream," a program that lets you "live out your

wildest dreams." Not a bad deal for ninety-nine cents!

I also wanted to find the single heaviest item for sale. The winner, at 9.9¢ per pound: a 10-lb bag of kitty litter. The best perceived value award goes to the "LeWorld" LCD watch, with "Quartz Accuracy." The watch is made in the Darth Vader style, black and chunky with useless bevels and protruding knobs. What appear to be four screws around the perimeter of the watch are merely painted-on screw heads. Best of all are the illustrations beneath the crystal indicating the three activities for which the watch can be useful: soccer, leaning sideways, and sitting on a bar. Also printed on the watch's face are the time differences between major world cities, and a red fish. I like my 99¢ watch, and only have two problems with it. One, the watch face says "WATER 100FT RESIST," but the package it came in says "This is not water resistant." Two, the watch loses about 40 minutes a day.

Even though there were many things left to investigate – clothing, kid's furniture, 3-packs of off-brand beer – I was starting to get my fill of The 99¢ Store and needed to go. But before I left, I wanted to buy one of the many different kinds of porcelain figures for sale. Clowns, squirrels, barnyard animals – so many to choose from! I finally settled on a cow laying on its side. The cow is painted entirely black and gray, except for garish pink udders, which poke out of the side of the cow in a

way that makes me think more of malignant growths than milk teats. I took my cow (which has a "Made in Brazil" label printed in mirror-image type) and headed for the checkout counter. The guy in front of me had one of the best mullets I'd seen all day. He was buying 4 bottles of Coors beer baseball bats, and a set of hacksaw blades. His friend, who was buying a walkman-style headphone set that came with a vinyl carrying pouch, glanced into my basket and noticed what I was getting: potted meat food product, rocketship drinking glasses, a quartz watch, a bunch of toothbrushes, and a clay tumoral cow. Then he looked up at me, smirked, and nudged his buddy, silently signaling him to "check out the weirdo." Even the checkout girl gave me and my purchase a second look. I thought "anything goes" would have been the motto of The 99¢ Store. But that was silly of me to assume. I was here for a different reason than the other customers. They were shopping for things they really believed they needed and I was researching this article. Still, our differences were only superficial. We were the same, deep down. We were all fellow travelers at The 99¢ Store, pushing our squeaky carts through blindingly-lit, linoleum-paved aisles, gawking at ridiculously low-priced products shipped in from around the world, flabbergasted to be somewhere where buying the experience of shopping costs next to nothing. **X**



You're on CANDID WEBCAM!

It's 11:14 pm in San Francisco. I'm looking at the computer room of the University of East Anglia in Norwich, UK. A few computers sit on long tables against the walls, but the room is uninhabited. At 11:17, I take a peek at a bus stop on Wilshire Boulevard in Beverly Hills and notice a couple of shadowy figures standing behind a bench. A few minutes later, I'm looking at a blunt-nosed lizard named "Biscuit," who's sleeping in a glass terrarium on the other side of town. If I feel like it, I can take a look at a coffee machine in Cambridge, a fish aquarium in Northern California, the Brooklyn Bridge, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, or the North Central Expressway in Dallas Texas.

No, I'm not flipping through channels on cable TV. I'm clicking buttons on my Netscape browser, checking out various live picture "webcams" hooked up to the Internet.

Webcams are the eyeballs of the Internet. In fact, the most commonly used webcam – the Connectix QuickCam – looks remarkably like a handball-sized, beige-colored eyeball with an optic nerve that conveniently plugs into the data port of a personal computer. The QuickCam, which costs about \$100 (the same amount of money that people happily plunked down a few years ago to buy a computer mouse), is the black & white digital video camera that has brought image broadcasting to the masses.

The idea of a global computer network equipped with thousands of tentacled eye-stalks scanning the planet sounds exciting, and once in a while the reality lives up to the promise. Watching that bus stop on Wilshire gives one the sense that something is about to happen, and in fact something could and it is that possibility that keeps us glued to our monitors. Most people, however, like to aim their webcams at more mundane sites: computer rooms, houseplants, the mountain from their kitchen window, or their exotic, frequently listless, pet.

Whenever a new medium is born, people are happy to produce and consume empty content, because the simple act of using the new medium has novelty value in itself.

When motion picture technology was new, audiences packed into auditoriums to watch movies without a story. The Internet is still new enough to most people that the very thrill of participating in it is enough to keep them interested.

"The Web is still in the stage that I think of as the Dr. Johnson's dancing dog stage," explains writer Gerard Van der Leun. "Dr. Johnson, who was an 18th century book critic, once remarked that the fascination in watching a dancing dog was not



11:17PM
PR. 17 1996

that it danced well but that it danced at all." After a while the novelty value of webcams will wear off and people will stop visiting sites that display office buildings, city skylines, and parking lots. Then what will the successful webcams point to?

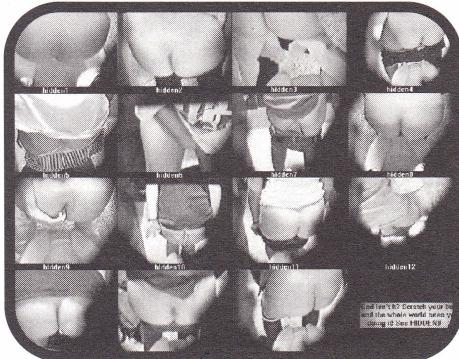
The Tap Online Web site (www.taponline.com/tap/voyeur/spy-cams/bestspys.html) recently asked users this question. Suggestions included hiding a camera in the steering wheel of an automobile "so if a car is stolen and recovered you would have the proof right there to convict" and placing a webcam "under the microphone used by a major artist during a concert to see how his mouth and face and facial features change during a concert."

to monitor their reaction as the purchase is made." In other words, they don't give a hoot about others people's right to privacy, they want entertainment! And judging from the success of voyeurism-as-entertainment in other types of media, coupled with the fact that webcams are cheap and small enough to conceal easily, surveillance might just be the best webcam audience grabber of them all.

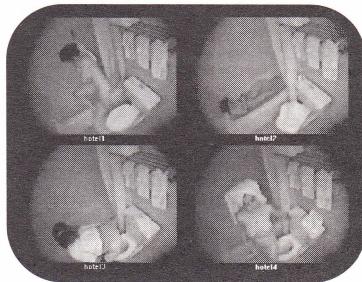
From trading gossip about a coworker's drunken behavior at the office party, to snooping through a neighbor's medicine cabinet, to trading home sex tapes that somehow found their way out of celebrities' vaults, people from all cultures are fascinated with the private lives of other people. In the Bay Area recently, a male landlord installed a video camera in a female tenant's fire alarm. The camera was so well concealed it wasn't even discovered during a battery change. When the landlord mentioned things he shouldn't know, the tenant got suspicious and called the police. A lawsuit is underway.

Even though we don't want others to observe us unless we give them our consent, the urge to snoop is overpowering. In pre-WWII Japan, village houses had paper-thin walls and were built right next to each other. Maintaining privacy was impossible. In order to uphold harmony in the community, neighbors didn't publicly acknowledge the sounds of fighting, farting, and lovemaking emanating from adjacent houses. But

that doesn't mean they weren't listening and whispering about it with their spouses and friends. After WWII, when western building materials were used to construct dwellings, people were shut off from the sounds made by other families. The entertainment they once obtained from noisy neighbors was replaced by virtual voyeurism in the form of magazines (and later television shows) that investigated and uncovered the adultery, drug use, and gambling problems of celebrities. Japanese TV producers often set up video stakeouts to capture famous people in the act of bringing prostitutes into pay-by-the-hour motels. Being able to watch rich, powerful people succumb to temptation serves as a substitute for listening to the next door neighbors loudly screwing or



Another person suggested installing a hidden camera in front of a drug-store's condom counter. "Then you could see people nervously approaching and circling the display before making their selection. Have a second one at the checkout register



screaming.

TV shows that catch people in the act of being "no good" or looking foolish is big in the United States as well. *America's Funniest Home Videos*, *Caught in the Act*, and *Cops* are about showing people in situations we're grateful not to be part of.

Now that almost anyone can send photos and video over the Net, we're beginning to see surveillance Web sites, which catch people committing embarrassing or criminal acts.

Peter Stone is the creator of the Pavement Terror project (<http://www.enrapture.com/pterror/index.html>). A former delivery driver living in the UK, Stone describes how he came up with his idea: "I discovered that the van I had to drive could very easily be persuaded to produce very loud, frightening backfires as and when I wanted it to and as I've always been keen on photography, I tried an experiment." Stone's experiment was to install a camera in the van's back window, behind a retractable black curtain. The camera was controlled with a cable long enough to reach Stone in the driver's seat. When Stone noticed pedestrians behind him, he'd make the van engine backfire and snap a photograph of the unwitting subjects just as their muscular reactions jerked their bodies into grotesque, contorted poses. Stone's work might appear somewhat cruel, but he explains that "out of (partial) consideration for my fellow man, I avoided pensioners, dentists' surgeries and gynecologists."

Scaring the daylights out of people before taking their picture seems positively benign when compared to the material available at Voyeur's Anonymous (<http://www.eden.com/~midnight/menu.htm>). This

"Voyeur/Candid/Hidden camera" aficionado Web site features photos of people who are apparently unaware that a camera is trained on them as they sit on public toilets, take baths in motel bathrooms, and change clothes in dressing rooms. Videos snippets can be downloaded from the site, and if you need a more in depth look, you can order a 60-minute tape online.

If you think these examples of clandestine observation are aberrations, take a look around you next time you go out in public. You'll notice cameras pointing at you wherever you go – banks, ATMs, museums, liquor stores, elevators, 7-Elevens. People may not like them, but they're considered to be just another necessary evil. We're told that we need these cameras to cut down on crime. They protect us. But when only government agencies and institutions have cameras, and they're hidden behind one-way mirrors, we need to consider what it means to live in a world where we can never be sure that authorities aren't watching our every move.

Is there a solution to all these surveillance cameras pointing at us? Steve Mann, of MIT, thinks he has one – more cameras. Mann is not happy that large organizations can shoot us with their cameras, but we aren't able to shoot back. So he's built a helmet equipped with a video camera that transmits images to his Web site (<http://www-white.media.mit.edu/~steve>). Mann

wears this camera all the time, (except when he is in the privacy of his home), so you can tune in and see what he is looking at. Mann would like everyone to wear a web-cam helmet in public, because everybody would be more polite, sort of like in a paper-walled Japanese village, and it would keep people with hidden cameras on their toes as well.

In a perfect world, according to Mann, nobody would use surveillance cameras, but since the genie's out of the bottle, the next best thing is to have several, independently-operated webcams pointing at everybody (and he stresses that the webcams should be visible, so people know they are being recorded). The worst case, Mann thinks, is an institutionalized hidden camera system, where the watchers keep everything they see a secret.

Even though the price of video technology continues to go down, and instructions on how to build your own webcam helmet (Mann calls them "personal security systems") are available, it's hard to believe this idea will catch the public by storm. By nature, people want to be watchers, for they can gain things from this activity: titillation, information, control. But people don't want to be watched, for they have something to lose: secrecy, dignity, power. So the trick is to watch without being caught. Cheap, miniaturized technology is making this easier than ever. Surveillance cameras aren't going to go away. It'll just seem that way. **X**

This seemed *too* easy. According to the ad in the Sunday paper, we could enjoy a cushy night at an exclusive Sedona, Arizona resort ("suggested retail value up to \$200!"), including dining/shopping, spa/pool, entertainment and free scenic vistas for just \$9.95. The small print stated that we had to be a couple (check), with a minimum income of \$40,000 (over how many years?) and between the ages of 26 and 68 (double check). Here was

I SURVIVED A

the catch: *"Both spouses must attend a 90 minute guided tour and sales presentation. This material is being used for the purposes of soliciting sales of a timeshare interest."*

Knowing that everybody in my family had run this scam before, including my parents – who are still trying to unload the timeshare they got trapped into in Mexico – I called my brother for advice on how to handle the bait-and-switch. "Don't do it," he said, a tad more seriously than I expected. "Unless you think you can act like a total asshole, they're really gonna give you the hard sell. It's really uncomfortable, trust me, it wasn't worth it." I assured him I could handle it. Besides, I barely had money for an apartment, let alone a vacation home. His last piece of advice, "if you decide to do it, act a little crazy."

My girlfriend made the reservations and we huddled to form our plan. We drove up on

a Friday afternoon and when the valet saw my beat-up, rusty Honda hatch-back, he practically yelled out "scammer!" and quickly retreated inside, not offering to help us with our backpacks. At the front desk we were directed to the "Sales Coordinator" in the corner of the plush lobby. My girlfriend approached, practically waving the ad so as to make our intentions crystal clear, and the lipstick-smeared woman behind the desk (let's call her Kiki) smiled her most contemptible "just here for the freebie, huh, you cheap bastards?" smile and filled out the paper work. We were then led to our suite, a two-bedroom affair with a balcony, comfy

on the Spectravision-equipped 27-inch TV. And we needed our rest, because the next morning we would face out biggest challenge, dodging The Pitch.

After a wonderful night's sleep, we rose early, stuffed everything that wasn't nailed down into our bags (soap, conditioner, shampoo, toilet paper, tissues, dish soap, sponge, complimentary coffee, etc.), not because we needed it, but because we wanted our money's worth. We went for a hike, rushing back already "in costume" for the tour. Looking like a couple of lost drifters, both in grubby hooded sweatshirts, cut-offs and dusty boots, we were once again given the "you

TIMESHARE NIGHTMARE

couch, kitchenette, king-size bed and a stunning view of the red rocked mountains. We could hardly contain our laughter.

That night, after a quick swim in the 80-degree pool, a soothing hot tub and quick work-out in the huge gym, we went to dinner at one of the four restaurants in the "compound," our \$30 in complimentary funny money close at hand. When the bill arrived, we were practically cackling as we handed over the oversized blue money, and it was all I could do to hold back from asking our waitress if she'd accept Monopoly money for the tip. Since the bill was a shade over \$30, I was also tempted to run back to our pal Kiki and see if she could spot us some more crazy cash, but the office was closed already.

We slept like babies in our king-sized bed, after watching a complimentary movie

must be here for the freebie" scowl as we

snatched up complimentary sodas and snack food while we waited for our guide. On the way over, I decided I would keep my mirrored shades on the entire time, because, like my brother, I didn't trust myself to be a complete asshole unless I could somehow avoid direct eye contact. As we waited with the other fidgety couples, we had to remember to focus like mad on the task at hand, attaining the all-important stamp on our voucher that signaled we'd completed the tour and were free to go. Without that stamp we would have to pay the full retail value of our cozy night, something we were about \$190 short of.

The hand-pumping, just-eaten-shit-grinding rep, let's call him Not-So-Slick-Willie, waltzed up to us and made a beeline for my

BY "GIL"

hand, making sure to grab it first to show he knew who wore the pants in this couple. He slimed his arm around my partner-in-crime's shoulders and guided us back to the briefing room, which was dotted with two dozen round tables, at which sat two dozen confused-looking older couples and their hand-

ing then, either?" he quickly snapped back, laughing a bit too loudly, showing off his toothy grin and easy sense of humor. I could tell this guy was good, but I would be better.

I dropped a hint that backgammon and hiking were more my speed. He seemed stuck for half a second, but changed gears without

for the bathroom and I took the opportunity to lean over and, looking him square in the eyes over my pushed-down shades, tell it to him straight. "We're probably not going to be signing any papers today," I said, putting on my most sincere face. And this is where, even if I was interested, Willie would have lost me.

"YOU SEE, MY BOSSSES WANT ME TO TRY AND GET YOU TO SIGN SOMETHING TODAY, BUT I JUST WANT TO SHOW YOU AROUND AND ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS."
I SMILED, SAT BACK AND TOLD THE AGENT, "GOLLY, THAT'S GREAT."

rubbing hosts. We passed a row of mini champagne bottles on ice and I asked Willie if I could grab one as an appetizer for the tour. He smiled his widest Cheshire Cat grin and said they were for "later." I settled for more free Pepsi, certain that there'd be no complimentary, cheap celebratory champagne for me that day. As I took a seat, I was sure I could hear Willie's colleagues snickering under their breath at poor Willie when they got a load of us. They seemed to know what I knew and what Willie was quickly realizing, there'd be no joy in Commisionville that day. The salespeople all appeared to have perfect, shiny teeth and permanent smiles, and a boundless enthusiasm for their jobs.

Willie, who had the charm factor and wardrobe of Used Car Salesman Ken, (hunting-themed tie, faux-designer suit, almost perfectly coifed hair) tried to break the ice by pumping me for information about my hobbies. "You like to hunt?" he wondered, quickly pulling out a dog-eared brochure of some properties known for their proximity to well-maintained stocks of sitting ducks and deer. "Actually, we're both sort of opposed to it, you know, it's not really our thing," I said. "Oh, well, I guess you're not too big on fish-

a blink of an eye and "spontaneously" brought out a series of teaser brochures that were equally well-worn and tired, almost as tired as his rap, and we could tell these were the same bits of chum he used to prep all his clients. He ran us through a series of increasingly exciting properties that could be ours, then, looking around and talking out of the side of his mouth, told us in confidence, "you see, my bosses want me to try and get you to sign something today, but I just want to show you around and answer any questions." I smiled, sat back and told my new friend, "golly, that's great, I'm excited." Golly? Man, this was going to be easier than I thought.

Willie kept blathering on and citing figures, and our eyes just glazed over as we repeatedly peeked at our watches, nodding in unison as if the information wasn't just flowing off our backs like water off one of the freshly-killed ducks on his tie. I was momentarily impressed with his cool upside-down writing trick, when Willie said he "forgot" a brochure and went to grab it. I can only imagine the razzing he got from his pals in the back room as they shared a smoke and teased him about the "timeshare hippies."

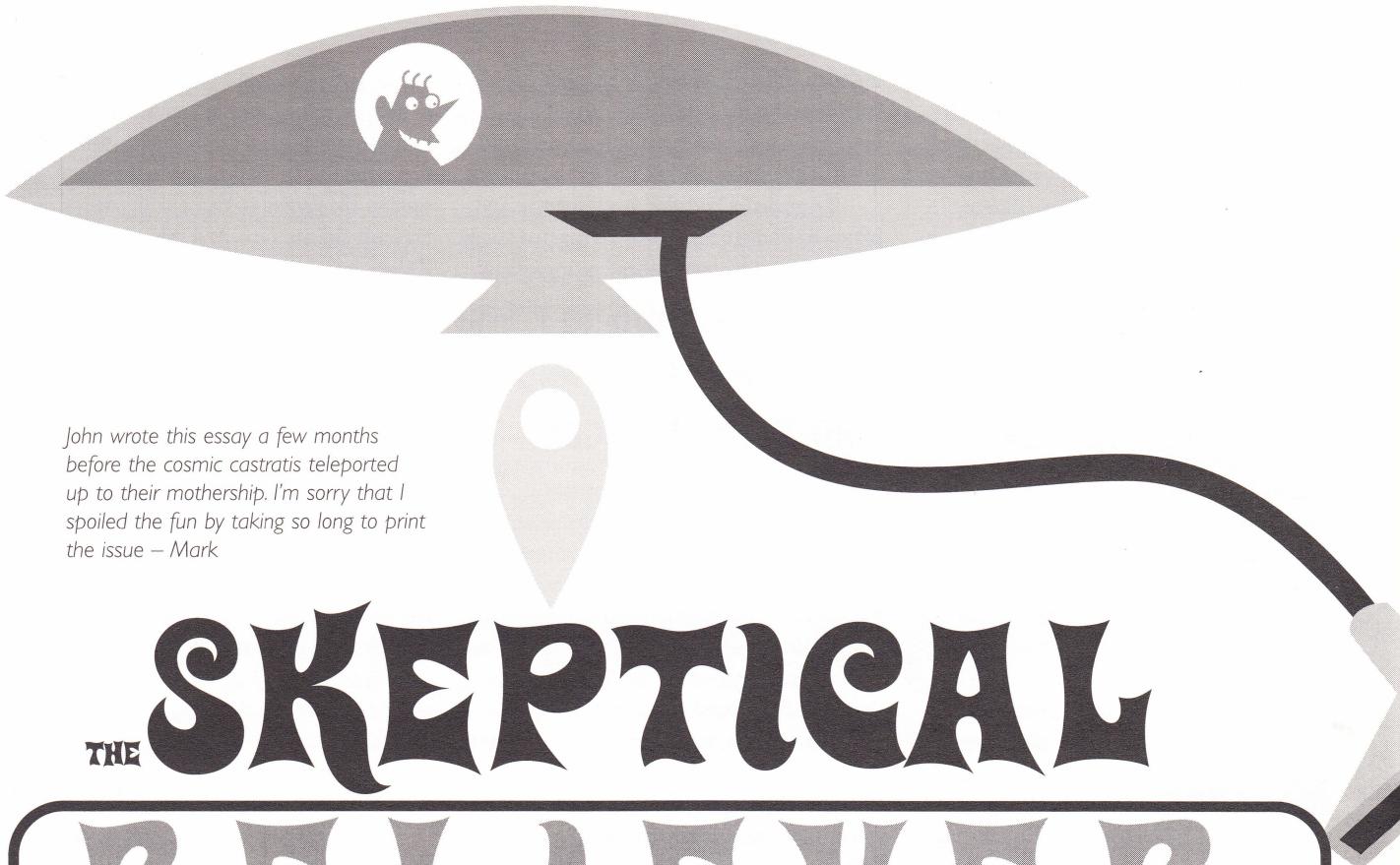
As soon as he got back, my co-pilot left

He could have just dropped the façade and said, "yeah, I know." But this guy was *relentlessly* phony. "Oh, don't worry, y'know, I mean," and this he said out of the side of his mouth again, "it's my boss who wants to put the screws to ya, y'know, get you to sign something today. I just want to show you around and get you the best, most appropriate deal."

I sat back and smiled. "Man, that's great."

Willie showed us around and we were honestly impressed with the well-kept grounds and amenities. Pegging us for rockers, he thought he'd appeal to our star-struck side by showing us a Wall of Fame with celebrity guests like Vanna White and Axl Rose (whom he once took a steam with. "Very nice guy."), but after eighty minutes he broke down and defeatedly asked if we had any more questions. Nope. He told us to hand over the voucher so he could get it notarized. Yes! We gave each other a mental high five.

Best of all, on the way out, we realized the receptionist jotted down my first name and my girlfriend's last name on the voucher, which means that we can easily pull this scam at least two more times. X



John wrote this essay a few months before the cosmic castratis teleported up to their mothership. I'm sorry that I spoiled the fun by taking so long to print the issue — Mark

THE SKEPTICAL BELIEVER

A COLUMN BY JOHN SHIRLEY

Everyone's trying to see past the boundaries. They want to see past the edges of mortality; or past the frontiers of perception; they want to see past the barriers of time and space, which really means past the barriers between themselves and peo-

ple around them. They try to see into the future; they try to peer into the dust-tailed past. They don't spend much time in the present. They crowd along the fences of the fringes of the consensus reality. They're motivated by fear and hope and sometimes by some-

thing profounder than those and deeper than curiosity. Step into the fringes, and you see a suggestive chaos. If you don't erect a skeptical filter, the Rorschach effect will take hold; the chaos will Rorschach-twitch itself into whatever you came there hoping to

see...

The impulse to explore the fringe of consensus reality is, in many people, and unknown to them, something more: an underlying spiritual hunger. In those people, it is something sacred. This sacred impulse for seeking has been desecrated and violated by cults and cult leaders and false prophets and false gurus. The most recent manifestation of this violation of the sacred impulse to seek comes from the new crop of FLYING SAUCER CULTS.

The UFO field, if field it can be called, is an exemplar of a thesis beloved to me; that many things are true and untrue at once; that yes and no can be said in answer to the same question, accurately, for many, if not most, situations. The Israelis have been

unfair to the Arab people; at the same time the Israelis have acted logically and reasonably.

The PLO and related groups are terrorists; at the same time they're not terrorists, they're freedom fighters; both things are true, and are contradictory. Yes a serial killer is a victim himself, is the result of forces too powerful for him, in his life, in both nature and nurture; no he doesn't deserve to live because of it. Yes he's a victim; no he's not just a victim. Both things are true.

It's true that the UFO field is bogus and largely inflated with

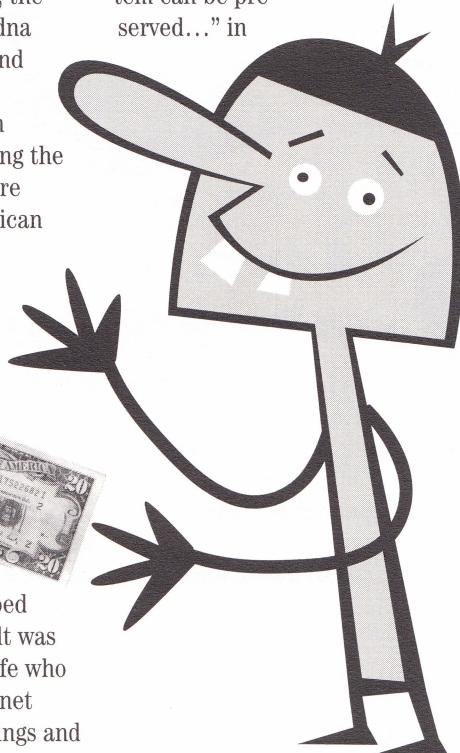
credulity and deception and that this makes flying saucers improbable; it's simultaneously true that it's founded in a reality, and that there is good reason to believe that flying saucers are real.

The saucer cults push us toward incredulity.

The saucer cults go back a ways, even before the saucers (which entered public awareness chiefly in 1947 with Kenneth Arnold's sighting and his coining of the term) to the pseudo-Theosophical I AM cult of the 1930s, which had regular psychic congress with Venusians. According to Peter Jordan in *UFO Magazine*, the sect was founded by Guy and Edna Ballard who were the Earthbound intermediaries of a Venusian named Sananda, also known, on our world, as Jesus Christ. Among the thousands of I AM followers were those "absorbed from American fascist William Dudley Peley's Silver Shirts – the influence was conveyed strongly

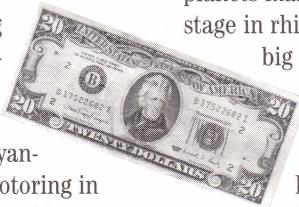
by I AM's staunch paramilitary character." The fascist, and racist strain in UFO cults crops up frequently. Steeped in the literature of the I AM cult was Marion Keech, a 1950s housewife who "contacted" aliens from the planet Clarion. Keech passed on warnings and advice from her alien chums; a group

of her followers gathered at her home on a fateful night when the Western USA was ET-predicted to be engulfed in a sort of re-enactment of Noah's deluge; there the saucers were to come, Marion calmly explained, to carry the faithful to safety. Of course, neither flood nor saucers came, but followers who need to believe despite the obvious contradictions will concoct outrageous rationales for failures of proofs. As psychologist Leon Festinger had it, in studying this group, "...new cognitions or rationalizations are created in order that the belief system can be preserved..." in



the mind of the devotee. (Hence Scientology too survives every damning accusation against Hubbard and his “org”).

As a child I adored the books of George Adamski, an imaginative UFO contactee who provided photos of what looked like flying saucers coming in for a landing (and which later turned out to be chicken-coop feeders hung from a wire). He also provided home movie film of what are obviously hub-caps and the like bouncing around on wires like something from *PeeWee's Playhouse*. Adamski met a blond, white skinned, Aryan-type alien who took him motoring in space and pronounced Adamski to be Chosen Among Humanity – aliens typically explain to the various leaders of



ascended to become the angel Uriel (aliens and angels are interchangeable, in Unarius). Wiser than Marion Keech, Ruth scheduled a mass saucer landing for the year 2001, a time far enough in the future to be unproblematic at the time of the original prediction decades ago. The Unarians still hold a marvelous pageant night, that rather looks like a Vegas chorus line without the exposed gams, with representatives from various planets marching front and center on the stage in rhinestone outfits and carrying a big rhinestoned banner proclaiming, “Planet Zooberiam!” (or whatever)... “Planet Casteroyl!”... “Planet Dolebobb!” The Unarians still offer classes extolling “your alien heritage,” served up in a conceptually boiled mush of reincarnation, New

contactee of recent vintage, has parlayed his rockstar style into a modest cult called Delphi Associates. He arranges expensive field trips to Area 51 to see lights that he explains are flying saucers and which the locals calmly identify as specific, predictable air plane flights from local airports. He prophesied that Mt Rainier would erupt and destroy Seattle in 1993 and 1994.

There are half a dozen other familiar cults; Swiss farmer Billy “hubcaps” Meier, who used catalog-recognizable hubcaps in his “photos of flying saucers”, contacted the gloriously advanced Pleidians about 20 years ago and has been thriving off merchandising ever since.

Belgian (if memory serves) race car driver Claude Corilhon encountered space aliens while hiking in 1973; the

“**As a child I adored the books of George Adamski, an imaginative UFO contactee who provided photos of what**

saucer cults that they and their followers are chosen and special. Adamski was discredited many times. The story I most remember is that he professed to be “working at Mt Palomar” – he was, in a hamburger stand...

Another Grand Old Contactee was Ruth Norman, the founder of Unarius; a veritable fount of Kitsch, the cosmetically big-haired Ruth dressed something like the good witch Glinda in the Wizard of Oz, all aglitter, with high, spangly collars, and even a wand. On dying in 1993, Ruth

Age vibrations and the traditional half-baked Southern California therapies.

In 1947, Allen Michael was in his truck in Long Beach when he was beamed up via “an ultraviolet light entwined with gold threads” (even their space-rays are kitschy), whereupon he was inspired by an ET contact to start a radical political party: the “Utopian Synthesis Party.” Utopia involves, among other things, making Allen Michael your leader.

Sean David Morton, a longhaired

aliens explained that people are lab creations of ETs called Elohim. Now called Rael, Claude humbly wishes to “unite all religions under one ideology,” handily headed by himself. Doing cult leader Rajneesh one better, Rael has encouraged wild sexual promiscuity among his funloving followers (perhaps this accounts for the cult's widespread – legspread? – popularity) all in search of an Elohim-blessed “cosmic orgasm”.

“The Two,” also called the Total OverComers Anonymous, mix UFO

imagery with Biblical imagery with hysterical abandon, and have provided what may be the template for many contemporary UFO myths at a time when alien encounters are beginning to pendulum to a negative perception of space aliens: Space aliens are using humanity for their own sinister purposes ("I think we're property." – Charles Fort) and intentionally keep humans "programmed" through false religious concepts; the "Luciferian" aliens abduct humans for "genetic experimentation" and enslavement... But of course joining the cult is the way to spiritual and material freedom... The sinister "genetic experimentation" theme has been consumed and much developed by the ever-voracious beast that is UFO folklore.

Another new and well organized saucer cult is Center of Attention, or COA, for whom saucers regularly land, even now, though somehow video footage of subsequent contact with aliens is never obtained.

totally independent, above even the President and the Joint Chiefs, and has taken advantage of Roswell-retrieved ET artifacts to create its own secret high-technologies, for example a device which sends special microwave beams into your head causing you to see "exactly what they want you to see", even to detailed encounters with God; Greer claims to have met with high level officials from the White House who commiserated with him over the power of this sinister group, and nearly wept in despair. Greer offers courses (\$300 for starts) in the "protocols" of "vectoring in" flying saucers – meaning that you use "remote viewing techniques" – to summon flying saucers... as he has. He and his associates have, they claim, summoned saucers with these telepathic techniques to a remote mountainside (presumably

and his friends can save us from. At his lecture he showed slides of photographed saucers (some of them never proven inauthentic) which were taken from various UFO books, and not one photo of the saucers he himself summoned, or their aliens. He explained that cameras and the like tend to malfunction around the saucers if you're that close – *doh!* – and on other occasions the cameraman happened to be distracted or...

Despite his lisp, Greer is a charismatic, powerfully articulate man, probably one of the best public speakers I've ever heard. And I can definitely say that he's probably the best damn liar I ever heard and this possibly makes him, despite his politically correct trappings, the most dangerous of all UFO cult leaders. He tells his stories of encounters with ET-obsessed intelligence groups with just enough detail and name dropping, balanced by plenty of "...I wish I could reveal his

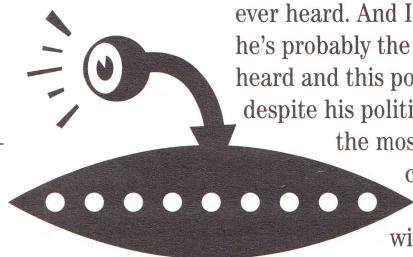
looked like flying saucers coming in for a landing (and which turned out to be chicken-coop feeders hung from a wire). 99

Speaking of missing footage, I recently attended a lecture by Dr. Stephen Greer, a physician from North Carolina who has founded the Center for the Study of Extraterrestrial Intelligence, or CSETI. Greer's perception of the alien situation incorporates both the sinister and the benevolent: an *X-Files* type shadow government called PI-40 has become

it's gauche to summon them to the White House lawn, say, or Woodstock 2) where they communed with these beings who told them that an astronomically-originated catastrophe is coming, a collision course comet or asteroid, and they are here partly to help with that and partly to study us. But getting in the way of all this is the evil PI-40 which only Greer

name" asides. He's thought through his vaguely Deepak-Chopra-style extraterrestrial philosophy of quantum uncertainty and astrophysical anomalies and mystical buzzwords: it all comes out sounding convincingly of a piece.

The best cult leaders and false gurus mix in a little truth with their concoctions of fantasy – and Greer has had



splendid grounding: he's a former instructor for Transcendental Meditation (TM); one wonders if he was involved in the notorious TM film depicting alleged "levitation" by "TM adepts" – a film that was easily debunked. He's learned his lesson somewhere; he's careful not to provide anything that can be debunked; no faked "Majestic 12 documents," no vague film footage (not at that recruiting lecture, anyway). He creates his "evidence" in the mind of the listener, or in the minds of those who buy his books; he weaves a story that sounds real, like any

of the way things are. More deeply than flattery, cult followers respond to the easy-fix offered by a leader who tells them that they are not necessarily going to die, that life as they know it isn't necessarily all there is, and that a cosmic parent has come to replace the parent who fled, or was never quite there when they were growing up.

Brilliant longtime paranormal and UFO researcher Jacques Vallee, author of *Messengers of Deception*, warns that not only could some UFO cults be subverted and co-opted by intelligence groups,

have implications for psychological warfare as well as for intelligence and operations..." Would they go that far? Since there is new, convincing evidence (see *The San Jose Mercury News* Website at www.merc.com) that the CIA was involved in marketing *crack cocaine* to the American people, it appears they are capable of anything...

Cult followers are sheared of money; they often sacrifice their freedom, they always squander their time. If Rael goes the way of David Koresh, they may squander their lives. But these losses are

“ Brilliant longtime paranormal and UFO researcher Jacques Vallee warns that not only could some UFO cults be subverted and co-opted by intelligence groups, some could have been created by them. ”

good novelist would do. He missed his calling; he'd make a great novelist, he'd make you believe. But then it's not likely that novelists get laid as often as popular ET contactees.

The enormously successful charlatan who channels "Ramtha" tells her students that they are "masters who have forgotten who they are." Since this sort of flattery is exactly what the student came for, she wins them over handily. UFO contactee cult leaders confer the same kind of specious specialness on their followers. They are special. They have been chosen to lead humanity out of the planetary darkness; the darkness

some could have been created by them. He has come up with good evidence that various intelligence services have staged, via drugs and other devices, certain "UFO abductions" as part of developing "control systems." The following is a direct quote from an actual letter (a photograph of the document can be found in the book *Above Top Secret* by Timothy Good) written by Walter B. Smith, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, around 1952: "1. I am today transmitting to the National Security Council a proposal in which it is concluded that the problems connected with Unidentified Flying Objects appear to

minor compared to something else that is squandered on cults: the original impulse to Seek for something greater, something Higher, something finer than what we are. The impulse to Seek the Sacred; the truth that cult leaders defame and disfigure.

*UFOs may well be real; every other day I think they are. A reasonably objective source of ongoing info – debunking as well as authenticating – is *UFO Magazine*, Edited by Don and Vicki Ecker: 8123 Foothill Blvd, Sunland CA 91040. \$25 per year. My Website is: www.darkecho.com/JohnShirley.html ✕*

Almost anyone who lives in a modern capitalistic society knows what it's like to walk past hundreds of titles in a video store, unable to make a selection. Eventually all those names running vertically down the spine of a video box begin to blur, and hasty selections are then often made. Ninety minutes of your life is too precious to waste on a bad choice. Here, bOING bOING offers some no-fail suggestions for your next trip to the video store.

— Matt Maranian

The Sonny and Cher Nitty Gritty Hour (1971)

I don't want to go on the record as condoning the use of narcotics – but if you're so inclined, *The Sonny and Cher Nitty Gritty Hour* presents more than just cause for killing off a few million brain cells. At the very least, fiddle with the "bright," "color," "tint" and "picture" knobs on your TV set to get the maximum effect of this abrasive, down-the-rabbit-hole glimpse at the early television career of Mr. and Mrs. Bono.

This *shitty* television special was the precursor to *The Sonny and Cher Show* – predating Cher's rib-

theme "battle of the sexes," *The Sonny and Cher Nitty Gritty Hour* pushes the musical-variety envelope with an improvisational comedy segment (quite possibly the first and last time anyone tried improvisation on television – this must have been a brainchild of Sonny's), in addition to Sonny's flat, nasal vocals – sounding much like a sick goose – on "We've Only Just Begun" and "The Beat Goes On."

Also included is a perfunctory "I Got You, Babe," after a lengthy recount of their first meeting and the beginning of their relationship over a black & white photo montage of "candid" shots at home with a toddler-aged, latent-lesbian Chastity. Without question, *Nitty Gritty's* high point is a number in which the pre-tattooed, pre-collagened, pre-orthodontic, pre-peeled, pre-cradle robbing, pre-Harley-Davidson, pre-infomercial Cher performs an overwrought "What's it All About, Alfie?" as Sonny narrates: "Cher represents the American girl, 1971, torn between two ways of life: the puritan ethic, and today's morality..." A near-anorexic Cher then proceeds with an ungain-

Hour makes me tearfully nostalgic for the old, fun Cher; jagged teeth, six layers of false eyelashes, Bob Mackie gowns and rouge stripes.

One viewing of *The Nitty Gritty Hour* pays out more grit than Sonny and Cher may have originally planned, leaving one with the feeling of having just been tied by the ankles to the back bumper of a fast truck and dragged across several miles of rough asphalt. Important to consider: Sonny is now a congressman. You may want to lie down and rest after the end credits.

Promises! Promises! (1963)

As a rule of thumb, any movie starring the brilliant Jayne Mansfield is sure to be worth the rental price, and *Promises! Promises!* showcases Jayne at her seasoned best. Famous for being the "first" movie to feature a big name celebrity topless; *Promises! Promises!* delivers in less than four minutes after the opening title sequence. This low budget,

THE TOP OF THE BOTTOM FIVE SHITTY CLASSICS ON VIDEO

"adult"

comedy gets a cross-country road-trip's worth of mileage out of subjects like infertility, adultery, homosexuality and gigolosim, and also stars Jayne's real-life husband Mickey Hargitay, plus a transgendered creature called T.C. Jones.

The story concerns two couples vacationing on a cruise ship; Jayne's character "Sandra" wants desperately to get knocked

tickling character "Laverne" or that stupid, recurring pizza parlor sketch. Loosely incorporating the extremely dated

ly, modern, free-form drug-dance to a medley of "All you Need Is Love"/"Funky Broadway" wearing only skimpy, baby-blue panties (with protruding hip and pubic bones), knee-high black vinyl boots and a gypsy-peasant halter top. *The Sonny and Cher Nitty Gritty*

up but her husband (the tremendously annoying Tommy Noonan) shoots blanks. After a series of kooky mix-ups, both women become “with child” and it’s unclear which husband fathered which embryo. The glamorous, show-stopping Jayne holds the whole movie together and, fortunately, she’s featured in nearly every scene. Her dresses are so tight that she has back-cleavage and her hairstyles will have you frantically hitting the rewind button on your remote. There’s an interesting moment when Jayne’s character “Sandra” does an impersonation of “Jayne Mansfield” at a baby shower -alongside a female impersonator hairdresser (T.C. Jones), and the dream sequences are worthy of a Dalinian canvas. Look for big hunks of the camera appearing at the bottom of the frame in some shots.

Jayne sings two great songs, “Lu Lu Lu, I’m in Love,” performed naked while writhing around in a sudsy bathtub, and “Promise Her Anything,” executed in her best Las Vegas-nightclub style. The perfect time to watch this movie is about two or three o’clock in the morning on a weeknight, alone, drunk, in the dark – with the glow of the television screen as your only source of illumination. You’ll soon find yourself hopelessly lost in the strange, stale, wiggy world of *Promises! Promises!*

Wicked Stepmother (1988)

Albeit a far cry from *Now, Voyager*, *Dark Victory*, or *All About Eve*, *Wicked Stepmother* could, in its own strange little way, be Bette Davis’s finest film. Though her portrayal of the aforementioned stepmother doesn’t rival any of her Oscar-winning roles, it’s every bit as much a punch-packed performance.

This was Bette’s last movie, and in 1988 as you may recall, Bette was not a pretty picture. Her twisted, post-stroke mouth painted a glossy ruby red is offset only by the deep, dark, crenelated lines running up and down her sunken cheeks – like the bark of an aged redwood smoothed over with a heavy spackling of pancake makeup. The bright auburn pageboy wig is a horrific compliment to the cadaverous pallor of her skin, and the overall effect is actually quite dazzling – or truly painful to witness, depending on your constitution. Each of her lines is arduously delivered as though she’s taking her last gasps of life – because in fact she was – and watching Bette maneuver her tiny, frail, boney frame from one end of a scene to another – grabbing on to nearby furniture for support, will certainly keep you on the edge of your seat.

She plays “Miranda,” a gold-digging witch who marries old men and drains them of their funds – it’s not important to know the rest of the story, and you only need to watch the first thirty minutes or so.

The video box promises “a campy, fun-filled witch’s brew of entertainment,” and though the movie tries awfully hard, it just misses. It’s a shame too, because they had Bette Davis in their favor, and she was obviously a good sport. She has all the best scenes; chain-smoking and throwing herself at a man young enough to be her great grandson. Unfortunately, she only appears in the first half of the movie, and unless you’re a big fan of Tom Bosley, Richard Moll or ex-Bond girl Barbara Carrera, you should just fast forward through to the end for Bette’s final on-camera credit. This last incarnation of Bette Davis will knock the wind outta ya!

Goin’ Coconuts (1978)

Donny and Marie Osmond star in this theater-release feature film shot entirely on location in Hawaii, with the ubiquitous Diamond Head prominently featured in virtually every outdoor scene. There are Utah jokes, teeth and toothpaste jokes, Marie wears her fashion trademark high boot/low boot, and Donny delivers the line “cute, Marie, *real cute*.” They both rely on their musical variety show acting style, which goes THUD without a laugh track, and their duets are laden with the same snappy repartee that television audiences became familiar with on *The Donny and Marie Show*.

Upon boarding their plane to the Islands for a “big concert,” a stranger gives the sassy, wise-crackin’ Marie an ugly pukka shell and driftwood necklace that, unbeknownst to her, is the missing piece to a treasure map leading to a sunken U.S. submarine filled with gold bars!! A gang of thugs go to all sorts of crazy lengths to get the necklace from the unassuming Marie; there are some close calls too, like when she finds her hotel suite ransacked, with a burglar three times her size riffling through her possessions – the quick-thinking Marie throws oranges at him and beats him with a pillow until he runs away.

Donny and Marie’s codependent sibling rivalry gets a little creepy, with Marie behaving more like a jealous lover than a sister. She makes the virgin Donny (calling him “D”) feel guilty whenever he expresses interest in spending time with *any* female other than herself, and when he finally does get a moment in their hotel lobby with another girl, she barks “I’ll give you FIVE MINUTES – then I’m going to come and get you!”

For their “big concert” (that lasts all of four songs), Donny does a Polynesian slap dance – wearing angel flights and a vest – with a bunch of half-naked luau dancers from “Kalo’s South Seas Revue,” and Marie swings poi balls, does a hula, and slaughters a couple of Hawaiian tunes. Catching a glimpse of the dangerous criminals lurking backstage, Donny and Marie take several laugh-riot encores to prevent coming face to face with them. After a series of chase scenes on foot (with Donny being mobbed by tourists), on motorcycle (with a brazen Marie poppin’ wheelies), and in motor boats (with Diamond Head in the background) the thieves are accidentally blown up by a Kawasaki jet ski loaded with explosives. Donny and Marie recover the gold bars, and soon after head back to Hollywood. As their plane soars over the Pacific and into an amber sky, the end credits roll to the thumping disco beat of their hot single “On the Shelf.”

Liberace in Las Vegas (1980)

Liberace in Las Vegas is shock treatment for those who have never seen “Mr. Showmanship” in action; this is his Las Vegas extravaganza taped in its entirety.

The show opens – on the video as it did live – with a short film. We see Liberace waking up in bed at his excessively decorated Las Vegas home, stretching his arms and rising for his piano-shaped day. As he throws back the gold lame sheets with piano key trim, his “butler” meets him bedside and helps him into a hideous white and gold satin quilted kimono. We follow Lee frolicking through various parts of his piano-themed house – the pool, the garden, the dining room, his bathtub (yikes!), and his walk-in closets. Finally, he gets all

gussied-up in his rhinestoned stage costume, kisses his six frou-frou dogs goodbye and is escorted by the butler and a french maid carrying a candelabra to his awaiting Phantom 5 Rolls Royce limousine, customized with mirrored tiles. They see him off as the camera pulls away from a close shot of the car’s vanity plate, “88 KEYS.” The car heads down the street, and eventually into the parking lot of the Las Vegas Hilton. The film ends, fading to black, just as the orchestra swells to a dramatic fanfare and the showroom’s spotlights come up on the same limousine driving out to center stage and parking. The chauffeur (the infamous Scott Thorson) comes around and opens the car door. Out leaps Liberace – waving his bejeweled stubby fingers and bearing a smile that looks almost like an epileptic seizure; his cheeks pulled up and back so tightly that his mouth is permanently fixed with a leering grimace, his upper lip peeled to his gumline, forcing his front teeth to chipmonkishly protrude. Equally, his eyes have been lifted back so taut – and are so laden with eyeliner – that he almost looks Asian.

As if making such an entrance – and wearing a fox-fur and rhinestone cape with a train fourteen feet long – isn’t enough, he has to comment on it for the next ten minutes. “How did you like the entrance – was that OK?” he asks, and the audience cheers. “What to you think about the car – ya like it?” And again they applaud – *they applaud an automobile!* “I’m so glad you like the car” he continues, beating a dead horse, “it really stops traffic when I shop at Safeway.” He then goes into a lengthy monologue about his fur coat. More or less this is his act; talking about his clothing. He built a career – *a long and prosperous*

career – on this. He then needs special orchestration to remove his coat, and receives a big round of applause for doing so.

The show is jam-packed with “surprises,” including a Mexican dance troupe, smoke machines, a rotating piano, an “exciting new talent” named Marco Valenti for whom words can do no justice, and the “internationally famous dancing waters.” (The audience obediently applauds the water upon Liberace’s insistence.) He changes pianos as often as he changes jeweled collar clips, often excusing himself to “slip out and get into something more spectacular,” emerging moments later in yet another garish, swingy cape that cost the lives of several thousand mink or foxes – always making sure to comment on how expensive each costume is. Lee croons some old standards and does a soft shoe, plays an extremely dramatic “Send in the Clowns” plus his old standby “Chopsticks.” You can easily fast-forward through all the boring piano numbers without missing any of the show. That he plays the piano is completely incidental.

After Lee sings “I’ll Be Seeing You” and takes one of his last of the show’s several hundred gratuitous curtain calls, he dashes backstage for a moment and returns harnessed to a fine cable. Quickly hoisted up over the stage, he laboriously flaps the heavy folds of his ostrich feather and rhinestone cape, swooping from one end of the stage to another, hanging in the air like a pudgy, nellie Dracula. “Mary Poppins eat your heart out” he drools, before touching ground.

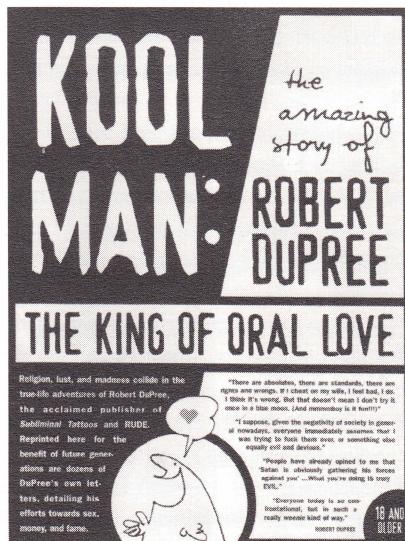
Liberace in Las Vegas will either inspire you to begin your own exciting career as a Las Vegas performer, or have you fervently promulgating the virtues of socialism. **X**

KOOL MAN

Sean Tejaratchi, publisher of the wonderful clip-art zine *Crap Hound* (see ordering info on next page), has a thing for Robert DuPree, publisher of *Subliminal Tattoos*. After Tejaratchi received a creepy letter of complaint for reprinting some Wally Wood artwork that Dupree claimed partial copyright of, Tejaratchi did a little investigating and discovered that the 40-something DuPree was secretly posing as four different polygamist, bisexual, 20-something housemates who published a zine of their sexual adventures, called *Rude*. Tejaratchi believes that Dupree created *Rude* "in a

bizarre effort to get laid." Tejaratchi corresponded with a couple of young women who had written Rudester "Jordan" by mail, who urged the woman to meet his wonderful sexy friend, Robert Dupree, aka the King Of Oral Love (K.O.O.L.). Tejaratchi continued to dig for more dirt on Dupree, and uncovered an astonishing number of slimy anecdotes from other people who had come into contact with DuPree, including a burned Robert Crumb. Tejaratchi put all the letters and information together in a 100+ page, beautifully-produced, one-shot zine, *KOOL MAN*. I broke into a cold sweat reading the damage-control letters Dupree

had written to his enemies in this sickeningly fascinating profile of one of the strangest characters in zinedom. *KOOL MAN* is the best thing I've read all year. \$5, Sean Tejaratchi, PO Box 40373, Portland OR 97240-0373.



Reviews

3-FACED RUBBER DOLL

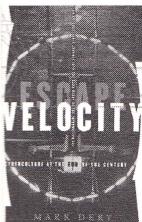
By rotating the knob on the top of the crying doll's head, you can adjust her mood from joy, to tearful sorrow, to sullen defiance. She's 100-percent plastic, and smells like a rubber pinch-me coin-purse. \$2: You've Got Bad Taste, on Vermont street in Silverlake.



KOOK'S MUSEUM

Donna Kossey has been writing about kooks for years in her zine, *Donna Kossey's Kooks*. She continues her love for wackos on her Kook's Museum, a site of the best crackpots and nut cases on the Net. I love Donna's color collage artwork that appears throughout the site www.teleport.com/~dkossy/index.html.





JETTISON THE BODY

Escape velocity is a number around 25,000 MPH – the kind of speed you need to leave the Earth behind. But the title of this book is really about the rate at which our culture is trying to leave the human body behind. Mark Dery crunches tons of data here on cyborgs, sex with robots, teledildonics (computer-aided sex), downloading the brain, movies such as *Blade Runner* and *T2*, and all kinds of posthuman headtrips in order to highlight the battle he sees between meat and machine. A damn fine critic and a near pop-culture panopticon, Dery re-enacts the Genesis story with this book – he appraises the huge undifferentiated morass of cyberculture and separates it into a coherent world.

Dery's book is fun to read, since his footnotes are just as likely to name-drop Hans Moravec or John Milton as they are an article from Amtrack's onboard magazine. I admire his patience in looking for serious contributions to the posthuman dialogue in people like Trent Reznor. Art-world equivalents of Nine Inch Nails also abound in this book: Stelarc, a man who hangs from buildings by hooks in his flesh, or Orlan, the french-woman who undergoes plastic surgery as part of her live perfor-

mance act.

Escape Velocity moves at the speed by which it's named and often gets too diffuse, since Dery doesn't always stop to digest info along the way. Did you know, for instance, that many young boys who later went on to become goth rock stars or biomechanical tattoo artists first dreamed of becoming cyborgs after they watched *The Six Million Dollar Man*? Grown-ups admit their early infatuation with the TV show at different points throughout this book.

With all this data in hand, Dery's main point is that much of the desire to jettison the body is linked to gender. The nexus of sex and technology in popular culture is most often male oriented, absolute, and pathological.

But while alienation of the body is a well-played-out criticism of technology, Dery's not at all in favor of back-to-the-land purity. His close readings of minute cultural fringes show that he's interested in ideas that reconcile the self with the machine world. Dery's real hero, after all, isn't Steve Austin but Donna Haraway, who'd rather dispense with culture/nature dualisms in order to study cyborganics as a playful blur of old categories. Dery quotes her as saying, "Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves." \$21.00: Grove Press. – Bob Parks

FAVORITE ZINES

Outré – about the creators of great popcult media from the '50s and '60s. \$20/4 issues. 1320 Oakton St., Evanston IL 60202.

Crap Hound – world's greatest source of clip art! \$5. PO Box 40373, Portland OR 97240-0373.

Beer Frame – obsessing over everyday products; a design junkie's delight. \$2 CASH. Paul Lukas 160 St. John's Pl., Brooklyn NY 11217.

Mystery Date – retro guide to beauty, sex, hygiene and fashion media. \$2 CASH. PO Box 641592, San Francisco CA 94164-1592.

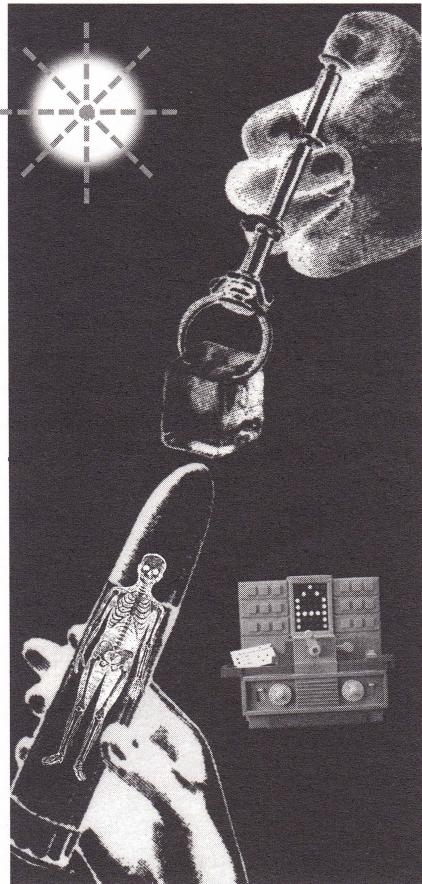
Thrift Score – how to be a consumer of great stuff even if you don't have a lot of dough. \$5 CASH or check to Al Hoff/Five issues. PO Box 90282, Pittsburgh PA 15224

Inquisitor – deep thought from one of my favorite media freaks, Dany Drennan. \$5. PO Box 132, New York NY 10024.

.tiff – best technoculture zine on earth. \$3. PO Box 97011-149 Roncesvalles Ave., Toronto, Ontario, CANADA. M6R 3B3. www.io.org/~tiff.

Code – fun, fuzzy, far-reaching. \$3. 1412 Northwest 61st #2, Seattle WA 98107.

SEND US YOUR ZINE!



Rudy Rucker's new cyberpunk novel, *FREEWARE*, will appear from Avon Books in summer, 1997, and his *SOFTWARE* and *WETWARE* will be reissued at the same time.

Rucker's home page is:
www.mathcs.sjsu.edu/faculty/rucker

SUNCHIES, CRMOTE, AND QUANTUM DOTS

TWELVE EXCERPTS FROM THE FREEWARE NOTES

Zip.7 by Rudy Rucker

1. THERE MIGHT BE ALIENS LIVING INSIDE THE SUN. Suppose we call them sunchies. What kinds of things do the sunchies do? What are they like? Suppose that they are the same thing as sunspots: vortices. It turns out that vortices spawn off baby vortices and herd them around. Why haven't we on Earth noticed that the sunspots are live sunchies? Maybe some of us have in fact already noticed.

As Terence McKenna puts it in *True Hallucinations*, "This is really an old idea – the siren song of Pythagoras – that the mind is more powerful than any imaginable particle accelerator, or sensitive than any radio receiver or the largest optical telescope, more complete in its grasp of information than any computer: that the human body – its organs, its voice, its power of locomotion, and its imagination – is a more-than-sufficient means for the exploration of any place, time or energy level in the universe."

2. MAYBE KIDS INSTEAD OF KILLERBLADES have things like mucus, like giant wetware slugs on their feet that selectively melt and harden up.

3. OLD FOLKS WITH A LIFEBOX. A lifebox is like a hand held tape recorder and computer, you talk to it and tell it the story of

your life. The lifebox asks you questions to fill in blank areas. It organizes the information into a hypertext. You make copies of it for your children and grandchildren. "What Grandpa Was Like." This is going to be a huge industry. Old duffers always want to write down their life story, but with a lifebox they won't have to write. It'll be like an automatic ghost-writer. The hypertext connection will be such that you can always interrupt and say something like, "Grandpa, you just mentioned cars. What was your first car like?"

4. SUPPOSE YOU CAN BE FROZEN AND RESUSCITATED, BUT NOBODY WANTS TO THAW YOU OUT. Why would they bother, really? Too many people anyway. People will try to write iron wills that they have to resuscitated. Or they hide the fact that they died, and let their lifebox software stand in for them on email, with a view to earning enough money for the big thaw-out a few years down the line. Death could become like birth is now, a constant series of exceptions and challenges.

5. I FIRST HEARD OF "CRMOTE" when some fan called "Dusty Limestone" in Brazoria, Texas, wrote me in 1984 and asked if I wanted some. I wrote back yes, he wrote that he'd forgotten writing me

but here they were: two coffee cans full of moist brown rice with something growing in it. A fungus with nodules the size of hazelnuts. He said it was a psychedelic truffle. He said he liked to dry them in the sun a little and then eat them like popcorn, recently he'd been eating 'em while playing pool and had turned into a green-scaled fire-breathing dragon. He said if I kept making fresh rice and transferring some of the culture, I'd have it forever.

I dumped one of the canfuls out on a window screen, picking off the rice, and getting a handful of nodules. I was scared to take them, then when I was drunk one night I did chew up some of them. Crunchy, with a greenish juice. I lay in bed for awhile, and then the floor rose up like a tidal wave. I got up, anxious, I was a knight in clanking armor, walking around the old Lynchburg house we had, more and more fearful. I went downstairs and flushed the other nodules, watching the vortex of them in the toilet, an exact copy of one of Escher's infinitely detailed spiral tesselation pictures. Eventually I came down. I never did well with psychedelics. I'm glad I don't have to use them anymore.

Wondering ever after what that drug was, I eventually got on the Net and asked the alt.drugs newsgroup if anyone had heard of it. Some guy in Germany, a Bert Marco Schuldes, wrote back that camote is a lump of mycelium of the psilocybe mexicana or psilocybe tampanensis that forms "under certain circumstances." So it's like regular psilocybin fungus that makes a lump underground since it can't get out to make a mushroom. Another guy wrote that his mycology professor had given him some, it had been highly potent, and that a few years later the prof had killed himself.

Schuldes also said, "The terms camote or camotillo are correct terms regarding Mexican folk use. The scientifically correct term for it is 'sclerotium,' plural 'sclerotia'. There is even a culture of until now undermined species of the psilocybe, which produces very hard, gem-like-looking deep-blue sclerotia. It was collected 1976 by Anderson from a pasture area in California." Would that be COBB Anderson?

6. IN THE FUTURE, ALMOST EVERYTHING A PERSON OWNS IS INTELLIGENT ENOUGH TO BE CONSIDERED ALIVE. Most of the objects in a person's home can talk, and have the intelligence at least of a dog.

This will not always be a good thing. Imagine coming home from a weekend away to find that your furniture has been bouncing around the room laughing and bathing its tissues in high voltage rental lights.

7. SUPPOSE WE GET A MIRACULOUSLY COMPACT ENERGY SOURCE IN THE FUTURE – call it, say, quantum dots.

Using quantum dots you can fly to the moon wearing something like a wetsuit, you can surf the beautiful curve of the spacetime geodesic to the Moon.

The Moon is just about out of the Earth's gravity well, so you need to accelerate to about 36,000 kilometers/hour. Pure mass-energy conversion would provide enough energy from a tenth of a milligram of quantum dots.

8. THE SALEM WITCH TRIALS ARE SO REMINISCENT OF THE SATANIC SEX-ABUSE TRIALS against day-care centers. In the future this same public hysteria will be rechanneled once again. Maybe

people will get hung-up about having sex with robots.

9. NEVER FORGET: the first private use for any new media technology is always pornography.

10. IF A ROBOT DOES WELL, IT GETS LIKE A PUBLISHING CONTRACT, lots of copies of the robots are made and sold. The more servile and agreeable robots are the ones who get copied. The more independent robots look down on them. "So why not?" says the servile robot. "At least I'm getting copied."

11. WITH GOOD HOME MEDICAL MACHINERY, it takes only a slight amount of training to be able to treat people. The people who do this are called *healers* as opposed to doctors. In order for doctors to be replaced by healers, it would have to be that the healers can't get sued. So maybe first it has come to pass that there aren't very many lawyers anymore.

12. WHAT HAPPENS AFTER WHAT VERNOR VINGE CALLS "THE SINGULARITY?" Vinge says that once computers get superintelligent they can devise even smarter computers which in turn design yet smarter computers, and there is a kind of explosive speed-up of intelligence: the Singularity.

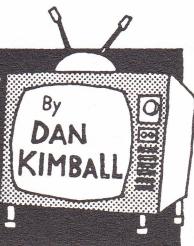
The Singularity has never been viewed in a particularly positive light. But try and see it as a back to Nature light. The point being that Nature is computing ever and always at the maximum possible flop. Up to the limits of the system. Maybe after the Singularity, our machines will seamlessly blend into Nature.

"So now beer-cans could talk about Spinoza. So what?" **X**

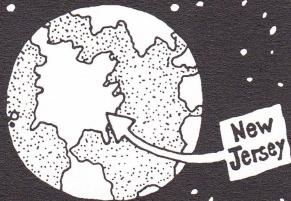


"INDOOR BOY"

.....because I like to watch TV!



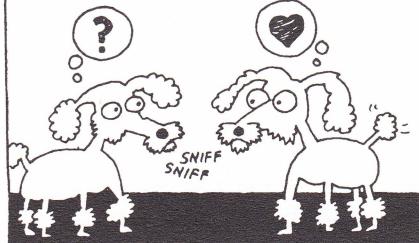
I WAS BORN AND RAISED IN THE SUBURBS OF NEW JERSEY. IT WAS A VERY ODD PLACE.



EVERY SINGLE HOUSE LOOKED EXACTLY LIKE THE NEXT ONE. IT WAS REALLY WEIRD.



EVEN ALL THE DOGS IN EVERYONE'S YARDS LOOKED THE SAME.



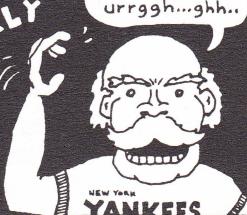
ANOTHER WEIRD THING WAS THAT EVERY SINGLE PERSON IN NEW JERSEY, WAS AN AVID SPORTS MANIAC - ALL OF THEM!



GO TEAM!



THE ELDERLY



urrggh...ghh...

EVERYONE LOVED SPORTS!

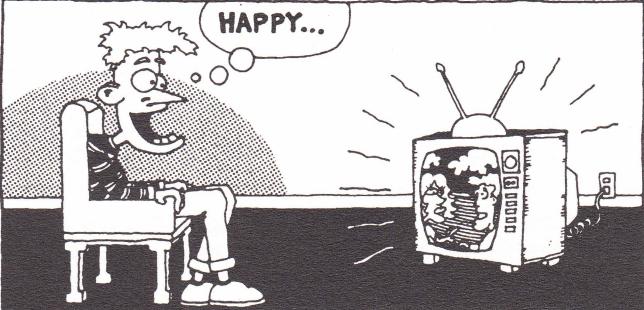
EVERYONE BUT ME - I LIKED TO STAY INSIDE WHERE IT WAS SAFE AND COZY!



MY DAD WAS ALWAYS ASKING ME TO DO CHORES AROUND THE HOUSE. I DIDN'T LIKE GETTING SWEATY OR DIRTY, SO I NEVER WOULD DO THEM.



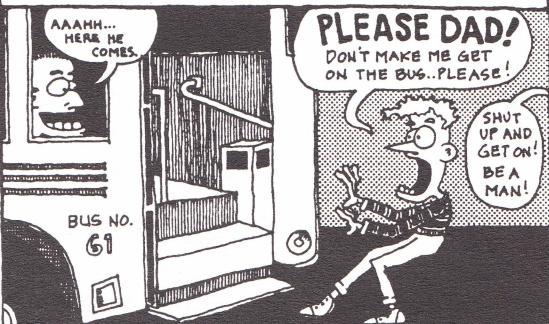
I DIDN'T HAVE TOO MANY FRIENDS, BUT THAT WAS O.K.! I HAD A FRIEND THAT MADE ME HAPPY AND STAYED INSIDE WITH ME. THE ONE FRIEND THAT NEVER LET ME DOWN WAS MY T.V. - TELEVISION WAS MY BEST FRIEND!



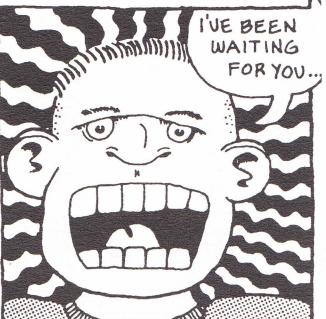
WITHOUT MY T.V., I REALLY DON'T KNOW HOW I WOULD HAVE MADE IT - ESPECIALLY THE BUS RIDES TO SCHOOL.



THERE WERE FOOTBALL JOCKS FROM SCHOOL WHO WOULD BRUTALLY TORTURE ME ON THE BUS RIDE.



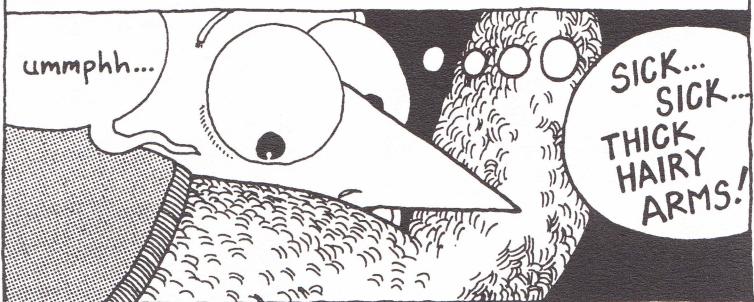
ONE HUGE ITALIAN KID NAMED DONNY WAS THE WORST OF THEM ALL.



I REMEMBER DONNY THE MOST, BECAUSE HE HAD INCREDIBLY HAIRY ARMS. EVEN HIS KNUCKLES WERE INCREDIBLY HAIRY.



I COULD ONLY STARE IN EXTREME HORROR AT DONNY'S PREMATURELY HAIRY ARMS, AS HE PUT ME IN AN APE-LIKE HEADLOCK. HIS ARMS WERE THE WORST PART.



DONNY AND HIS FOOTBALL BUDDIES WOULD THEN TAKE TURNS SQUISHING MY HEAD AGAINST THE BUS WINDOW WITH THEIR BOOTS. UNTIL ONE DAY... SOMETHING WONDERFUL HAPPENED!!



I DISCOVERED A SECRET WEAPON! I FOUND A WAY THAT KEPT ME FROM FEELING THE PAIN THEY INFILCTED UPON ME DURING THE BUS RIDES. THIS MADE THEM ANGRY.



YOU SEE, WHAT I DISCOVERED WAS THAT WHILE THEY WERE BULLYING ME AROUND, I COULD TOTALLY BLOCK THEM OUT BY DEEPLY THINKING ABOUT MY CLOSEST FRIEND - MY T.V.!



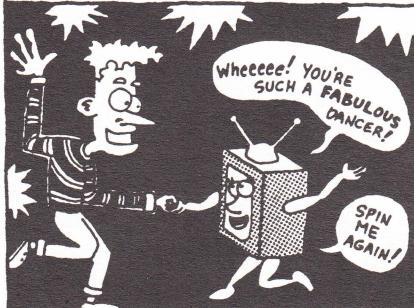
I WOULD IMAGINE WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE IF MY TELEVISION CAME TO LIFE! IF THE OBJECT THAT I SPENT COUNTLESS OF HOURS WITH ACTUALLY HAD HUMAN FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS. WHILE I WAS BEING PICKED ON BY DONNY AND HIS JOCK FRIENDS, MY T.V. PROVIDED A MENTAL ESCAPE.



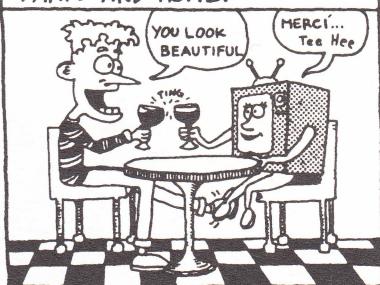
I'D PRETEND THAT THE T.V. AND I WOULD TRAVEL THE WORLD AND VISIT FAMOUS SITES.



WE WOULD DANCE TOGETHER AT ELITE CLUBS IN NEW YORK...



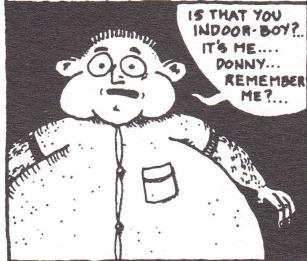
..AND DINE TOGETHER AT ELEGANT RESTAURANTS IN PARIS AND ROME.



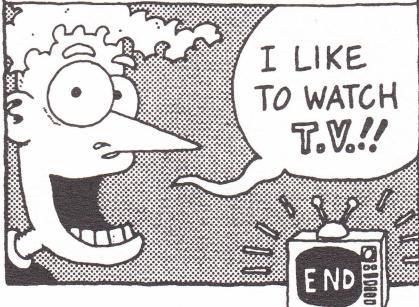
YES.... THE TELEVISION REALLY HELPED ME SURVIVE THOSE BUS RIDES.....



I RECENTLY SAW DONNY AGAIN. HE DIDN'T LOOK TOO GOOD. I ALMOST DIDN'T RECOGNIZE HIM IF IT WASN'T FOR HIS DISTINCT HAIRY ARMS.



YES.... LIFE GOES ON, AND I MUST ADMIT I OWE QUITE A LOT TO MY TELEVISION. IT NEVER LET ME DOWN. IN A CRAZY AND MIXED UP WORLD, ONE THING I KNOW FOR SURE IS THAT...



**SORRY,
I CAN'T MEET
YOU FOR LUNCH,
I AM ON MY WAY
TO THE STORE
TO PURCHASE A
BOING BOING
T-SHIRT!**

Enjoy *Boing Boing* T-shirts –
like our cover model –
and feel wonderful!

Make your T-shirt a *Boing Boing* T-shirt. It's processed a new, modern way! You'll feel so good when you wear it, that you can stand up your friends and laugh about it. Wear it as long as you like. You'll feel wonderful! Buy one today and prove it to yourself.

BOING BOING – the *feel wonderful* T-shirt

3 STYLES TO CHOOSE FROM

Dear *Boing Boing*: I don't want to miss out on making my life wonderful! Please send me as many T-Shirts as I can afford!

	Large	XLarge	Each	Total
KATA SUTRA (top)	_____	_____	\$12	_____
White shirt, black ink:	_____	_____	\$18	_____
Black shirt, glo-in-dark ink:	_____	_____		
MODEM GRRRL	_____	_____	\$14	_____
White shirt, black ink:	_____	_____	\$14	_____
RIOT NRRRD	_____	_____		
White shirt, black ink:	_____	_____	8.25%	_____
California sales tax	_____	_____		
Shipping (\$2 for 1st shirt, \$1 per additional shirt)	_____	_____		
Overseas orders add \$6 (Canada add \$3)	_____	_____		
Grand Total	_____	_____		

Name _____

Address _____

City, ST ZIP _____

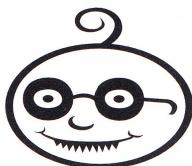
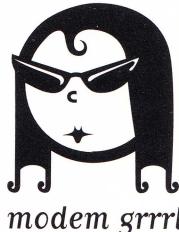
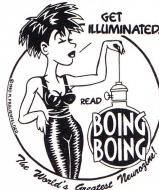
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Card # _____

Expiration Date _____

Signature _____

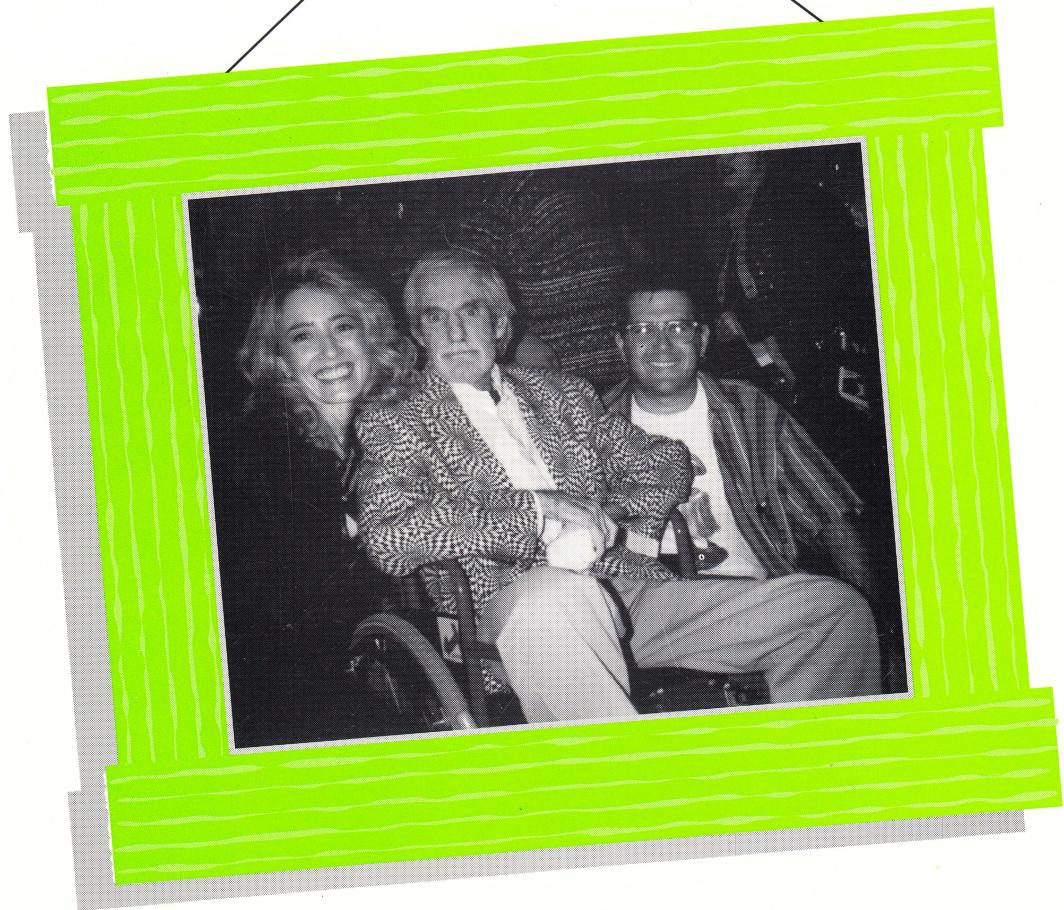
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